

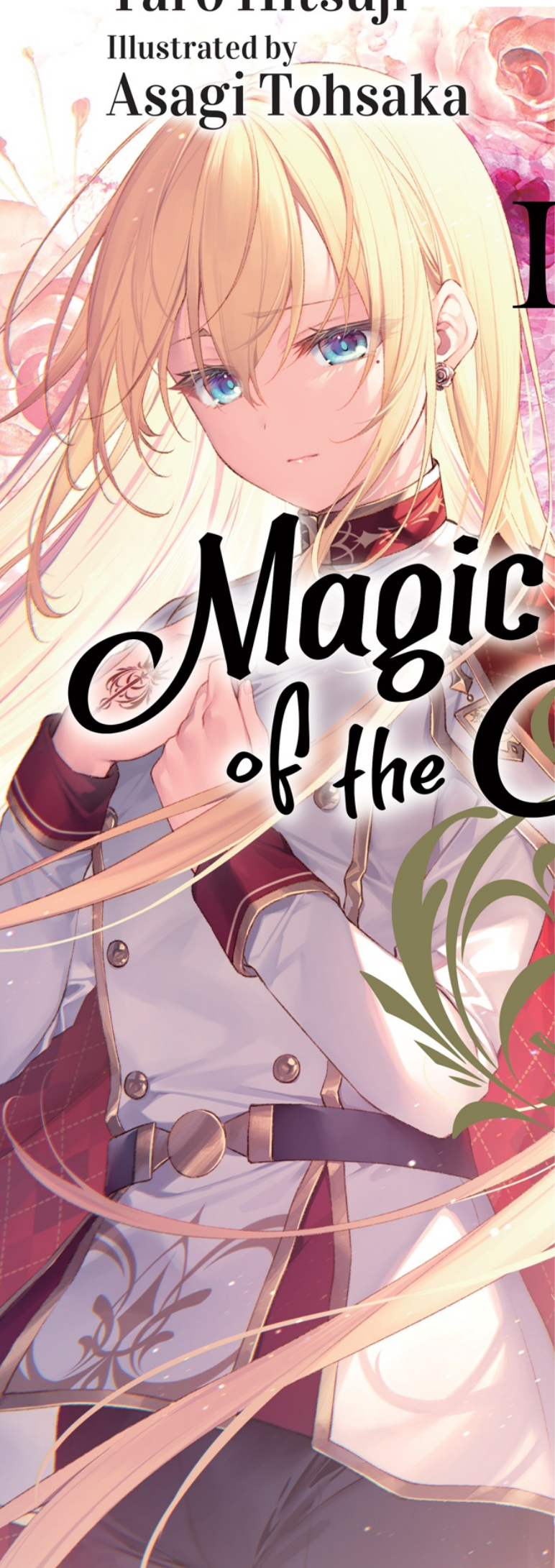
Taro Hitsuji

Illustrated by

Asagi Tohsaka

IV

Magic Knight of the Old Ways





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Magic Knight
of the Old Ways



“You’re not
just anyone.
You’re a king.”

Magic Knight
of the Old Ways

“A warrior living by the rules of the past”



A Knight Tells Only the Truth

Their Bravery Glimmers in Their Hearts

Their Swords Defend the Defenseless

Their Power Sustains Virtue

And Their Anger... Destroys Evil



Alvin

The prince of Calvania. Alvin trains under Sid to become a knight and inherit the throne to save his declining kingdom.



Sid

A man known as the strongest knight of the legendary era. Now resurrected in the present day, Sid mentors the collection of misfits known as the Blitze class.



Isabella

A half-human, half-fairy woman. Due to an ancient pact, Isabella offers her divine protection to the Calvania royal family and assists them as the leader of the Ladies of the Lake.



Tenko

A girl of the demi-human species called the noble-tailed people. Tenko was found by Alvin's father and grew up like a sister to Alvin.

STUDENTS

Christopher

A boy from a farming family in a rural borderlands village. Christopher excels in a strength-focused fighting style where he acts as a shield for his allies.

Elaine

A girl from a prestigious aristocratic family headed by a knight. Although Elaine's sword may be of the lowest rank, her book smarts and swordsmanship are some of the best in the school.

Theodore

A boy from an orphanage in an impoverished area. At odds with his seemingly intelligent appearance, Theodore is quite the delinquent and is skilled at pickpocketing.

Lynette

The eldest daughter of an aristocratic family that fell into ruin. An animal lover, Lynette is the most skilled horseback rider in the whole Blitze class.

KEY TERMS

Fairy Swords

Friendly fairies known as Good Fellows, who, in accordance with an ancient pact, have transformed into swords. Knights use these swords to perform all sorts of magical abilities, such as enhancing their physical strength or healing themselves.

Blitze Class

One of the classes at the Calvania Royal Fairy Knight Academy. Prizing liberty and good conscience, the Blitze class emphasizes students' personal beliefs and sense of justice. As the class is newly established, its student culture is hard to define apart from being highly individual. The class is named after the "Barbarian" Sid Blitze.

Calvania Castle and the Fairy World

The Ladies of the Lake and titan artisans combined their ability to build Calvania Castle. The castle serves as the threshold between the material world, where physical creatures like people and animals live, and the fairy world, where immaterial creatures like fairies and monsters live.

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Prologue: The Darkness Lurking in the Winter

“Finally, the time has come,” the enchanting witch—Flora—said and closed the book in her hands.

She wore a black robe, and an eerie crow rested on her shoulder. Having finished its report to Flora, it flew away, disappearing in the darkness above her as if it had never been there.

She was currently in the northern kingdom of Dachnesia, the permafrost land entrapped in hellish cold, snow, and ice. More specifically, she was in the throne room of the giant Dachnesia Castle, situated at the center of the ruined capital. However, she wasn’t alone.

Endea—the girl with long silver hair and wearing a black gothic dress—had been sitting wearily on her throne until then but suddenly stood up hearing Flora’s words.

“R-Really?! You finished the preparations?!” Endea asked, eagerly taking Flora’s hand.

“Indeed, my adorable master.” She chuckled and lovingly caressed Endea’s cheek with her other hand. “I just received a report from Sir Unicorn and Sir Lion. All the catalysts have been gathered. Now we just need to wait for the right time before carrying out the plan.”

“Th-Then...that means I’ll finally be able to get the better of that detestable Alvin?!” Endea smiled, truly happy.

“Indeed. And once you have accomplished this, you will be the one reigning over the world, and it will be yours.”

“Aha ha ha ha ha! I did it! I finally did it! Aha ha ha ha ha ha! In your face, Alvin! Serves you right! I’ll finally be able to enact my vengeance against Alvin, who took everything from me! I’ll finally be able to take *myself* back! Just you wait and see! I’ll destroy everything you’re trying to protect! I’ll deny your existence and steal everything from you! I can’t wait to see your tear-stained

face! Aha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!” Endea continued to laugh innocently—in a mad sort of way.

Flora chuckled as she watched Endea with her usual bewitching smile. She just watched her lovingly for a while.

“Well then, my adorable master, it’s time to enter the final stage of the plan.” She bowed respectfully to Endea, then turned her back to her. “I am going to recall all the dark knights we deployed. After that, I will take care of the finishing touches. For now, please relax and wait patiently.”

Flora walked away, slowly melting into the darkness, but just when she was going to disappear completely...

“W-Wait, Flora!” Endea called, making her stop.

“Yes?”

“Huh?! Ah, umm, err...” Even though she had called Flora, she was flustered and somewhat indecisive about what she wanted to say, but after a while, she started to speak nervously. “Well...if we go with the plan...everyone will die, right?”

“Indeed. Sooner or later, that will happen. Is that a problem? Don’t tell me...you are getting cold feet this late in the game.” Flora said, sounding amused as she tested Endea.

“Hmph! No way!” Endea spat in irritation. “I don’t care about a world that doesn’t love me! A world that killed me and denied my existence should just disappear! But...” She hung her head and looked at the ground in hesitation. Then, finally, she managed to squeeze out a mutter. “But...umm... I have a request, Flora...”



“A request?”

“Yes...”

Endea made her request. Flora watched Endea’s pleading expression silently for a while, then...

“...As you wish,” she said, twisting the corners of her lips into a smile.

It was a truly bewitching and fascinating smile.

Chapter 1: The Coming of Spring

Marche in the Year 1447 of the Fairy Calendar

Spring, overflowing with life, had come, and the Calvania Royal Fairy Knight Academy started a new year with a new wind. New students enrolled triumphantly, holding the dream and hope to become the knights who would support the kingdom. And now, these innocent freshmen were...

“Cough...cough...”

“I’m dying... I can’t move anymore...”

“How can he be so strong empty-handed...? I can’t believe it...”

“So...*this* is a knight from the legendary era...”

...in tatters, lying on the ground after being knocked down, already exhausted, and close to death.

“Ha ha ha, you’re so weak, rookies. I just brushed you gently. If you’re like that, it’ll be hard going.”

“No, Sir Sid... It’s their first time. You should go easier on them...” Alvin said.

In the training grounds of the Calvania Castle, under the blue sky and white clouds, Sid, the instructor of the Blitze class, looked at the groveling freshmen with a lukewarm gaze as Alvin, the prince of the kingdom, chided with a troubled smile.

With the new school year beginning, the Blitze class students became Second Squires, and the Calvania Royal Fairy Knight Academy welcomed new First Squires. They had passed the difficult test to enroll in the academy and finished the ceremony to make a contract with their fairy swords, giving them all the qualifications to be proper squires.

Naturally, enrolling in the academy meant entering one of the four classes.

The three dukes and the school's top brass expected the freshmen to choose the three strong legacy classes—Durande, Ortol, and Anthalo—and not the weak and newly established Blitze class. The Blitze class being from the royal family faction, the chances to get promoted in the future were pretty bleak, and the instructor was the infamous Sid the Barbarian. There was no way that anyone would enter this class...or so they thought.

Certainly, a lot of talented freshmen chose the three legacy classes, and some were even headhunted directly, so most of the students went there. However, the number of students who hoped to enter the Blitze class exceeded the top brass's expectations—there were more than twenty.

Considering each class was around forty students and that the year before, when the Blitze class was established, there were only six, that was a great expansion. Not only did they get the Asher-ranks the three legacy classes didn't want, even some Yetsera and Beriah-ranks joined too. And, most importantly, the greatest rank, an Atzilt-rank, joined them. That particular student refused all the invitations from the other classes and chose the Blitze class, surprising everyone.

"I guess you're right. It's a bit much for their first time. Well then, time to take a rest..."

"N-No! Not yet! I can still move, instructor!"

One of the groveling students quickly got up and protested. It was a petite and slender girl with chestnut-colored hair. She had big and round eyes, a thin nose, and pale lips. Her face was still a little childish, and her lack of refinement showed her village-girl upbringing, but she was beautiful enough that, if she dressed up, she could easily pass herself for a noble girl.

The girl with her squire uniform in tatters was protesting, holding her fairy sword in her hand. It was a saber-shaped green fairy sword adorned with jewels of the seven prismatic colors. It was clearly different from the average fairy sword, and of course it would be. After all, that girl was the promising new student chosen by an Atzilt-rank fairy sword—Yuno Aplent. She was the girl Alvin had risked her life to protect against a bandit in the Noire village.

“I-I have to become stronger as fast as possible so I can be useful to Prince Alvin! So I won’t be tired by this much! Please, let’s continue!”

And, as if being moved by Yuno’s zeal...

“M-me too... I want to become stronger too!”

“Me too...”

“...S-Same here... I can still move!”

The groveling First Squires started to get up like zombies.

“E-Everyone...” Alvin was deeply moved by her juniors.

“I see, that’s great,” Sid said as he looked at them. “However, you shouldn’t be so impatient. I fought against you all today to measure your strength...to ascertain your foundation. You guys are going to strengthen that foundation little by little from now on. It’s not something you can do in a day.”

“I-Instructor...”

“So for now, you should rest. Here, wear this and go run,” Sid said with a smile as he pointed at a collection of heavy armor in a corner of the training ground.

“Isn’t it weird to do *that* for resting?!” Yuno and the others yelled.

“Do you know the meaning of resting, oh great knight from the legendary era?!”

“We’ve been doing nothing but fighting against you and running since morning!”

“In fact, we rest more when fighting against you than when we run!”

“Instructor, are you trying to kill us?!”

“I’m resolved to give my life to this country, but I don’t want to die while training!”

All the First Squires complained to Sid with bloodcurdling expressions. As for Sid, he cocked his head, not understanding what they meant.

“Running is resting...right?” he asked Alvin.

“No comment,” she answered, looking away.

“Hmm... Is that what they call a generation gap?”

As Sid and the new students were making noise...

“I get you! I really understand you, my dear juniors!”

“Yeah! We were like that too!”

The two idiots of the Blitze class—the noble-tail girl, Tenko, and the brown-haired boy, Christopher—said with smug faces.

“S-Seniors Tenko and Christopher...?” Yuno and the others blinked as the two idiots started to talk passionately.

“I really understand how you all are going through a harsh and painful experience!”

“It’s difficult, and it feels like your heart is going to break, right?! You’re wondering why you’re doing all that when you could just use your fairy swords, right?!”

“However, you can’t use them! Fairy swords aren’t just weapons! They’re your one and only comrades who recognized you as knights and decided to lend their strength! They’re your friends and your equals!”

“You’re one in body and soul, and you share the same destiny!”

“Can you say your relationship is equal if you keep relying on their power?! No!”

“Exactly! Knights must first and foremost train themselves! Only a knight using Will, the technique allowing you to control your mana, can be a true knight suited to use a fairy sword!”

“Don’t worry! Anyone can use Will! As long as you’re determined and train yourselves, you’ll definitely learn it! We’ll help you!”

Tenko and Christopher released a torrent of words on their juniors with sparkling eyes.

“U-Umm...” Yuno and the other First Squires were troubled, not knowing how to react.

“These two... It seems like they are truly happy to have juniors.”

“Idiots as usual.”

“Aha ha ha...”

A little ways away, Elaine was watching them with half-closed eyes, Theodore with a disgusted expression, and Lynette with a troubled laugh.

“Oh? You’ve become quite the talkers, huh?” Sid said, looking fondly at Tenko and Christopher. “How nostalgic. I guess you guys running with tear-stained faces is something from the distant past, now.”

“Ha ha, people grow up, master.”

“Yeah, we diligently trained and did our best every day!”

“True, I know you’re not lying. You guys are always at the top of the practice match results with the other classes. In particular,” Sid looked straight at Tenko, “you’ve been quite amazing, Tenko. I didn’t think you would take the lead even against Third Squires. You really improved,” he said and patted Tenko’s head.

“Heh heh heh... You’re tickling me, master.” Her fox ears and tail fluttered as she happily let Sid do whatever he wanted without resisting.

Yuno and the other First Squires looked at her with respect and envy.

“That’s true... She really is amazing...”

“Yeah, in the match we saw before, she was so fast, and her swordsmanship was so cool!”

“That’s why she is the strongest Second Squire.”

“Hey, Senior Tenko isn’t the only one who’s incredible!”

“Yeah, you’re right! All the seniors in the Blitze class are amazing!”

“It’s thanks to them that I can have hope...that I know that sword-ranks aren’t everything...”

They looked at Alvin, Tenko, Christopher, Elaine, Theodore, and Lynette with respect and envy.

“You’re making me blush,” Christopher said.

“Th-This is a little embarrassing,” Elaine muttered.

“H-Hmph,” Theodore snorted.

They didn’t feel bad being praised.

“Anyway! Do your best, everyone! Of course, we’ll also do our best to set a good example!” Tenko concluded with a smug face.

“Those are some nice words, Tenko,” Sid said, making her smile brightly.

“I-I know, right?! We’re seniors, after all!”

“Yeah. And, as their seniors, you have to show them an example.”

“Yes! We have to!”

“Well then, let’s show them now. Come at me, Tenko.”

“Yes! I’m coming! ...Huh?” Tenko’s jaw dropped, surprised.

“Not just Tenko. All the Second Squires, come at me.”

“...Huh?” This time, all the other Second Squires were dumbstruck.

“After all you’ve said, you have to show to your juniors how much you can fight and how long you can last against me... Show them your limits,” Sid said with a grin, then took a stance.

“TENKOOOOOOO!” all the Second Squires screamed in resentment at Tenko.

“Huuuh?! M-Master?! W-Wait! We’ve been training since the morning too, and it was even harsher than usual! We’re too tired!” Tenko hastily said with tears in her eyes.

“Oh? Your chivalry lets you go against your words?”

“Ah... No, that’s...” She couldn’t say anything to Sid, who was looking straight at her.

“Well, I was also wondering how strong your Will has become, so it’s the perfect opportunity. Anyway, stop talking and bring it on.”

As Tenko, Elaine, and everyone else started to frantically use their tired brains to think of a way to get out of the situation...

“Let me join!” the dignified voice of a girl rang out in the training ground.

Everyone turned toward the direction of the voice and found a Second Squire girl with beautiful fire-red hair and twin swords.

“It’s Senior Louise from the Ortol class!”

“The one who always finds a reason to join the Blitze class’s training almost every day and is always sticking close to Instructor Sid!”

“Even though she looks scary because of her cold beauty and harsh words, she’s actually quite friendly and really helpful!”

“The riffraff should shut up!” Louise screamed at her juniors, then pointed one of her swords at Sid. “Sir Sid, let me join the fight! Today, I’ll finally beat you!”

“Hey, Louise! Don’t say unnecessary stuff!” Tenko tried to calm Louise, but...

“In that case, we want to join too.”

“Yes, I want to see how strong I currently am.”

Two Second Squires—Johan, from the Anthalo class, and Olivia, from the Durande class—made their appearance.

“Huh? Wait...”

But before Tenko could say more...

“A-Amazing! All the best Second Squires are reunited!” Yuno shouted with excitement. “And they’re all fighting against Sir Sid, the strongest knight of the legendary era! Just what are they going to teach us?! We have to watch them no matter what! Everyone! To become stronger, we have to burn the legendary era and our seniors’ techniques in our memories!”

“Yeah!” the other First Squires also yelled with excitement.

There was no going back.

“We *have* to do it now...”

“Uhh... I hope we’ll be fine...”

Elaine and Lynette accepted their fates and readied their weapons.

“Oh well. Just need to think of it as training for when an enemy comes while

you're already dead tired."

"S-Sorry..."

Theodore sighed and stood up, and Christopher readied his claymore, feeling guilty.

"We're going to die... Even though I already felt like dying after the super harsh training we did today..." Tenko grumbled with a pale face as she took her usual stance, ready to draw her katana.

"Prince Alvin! Do your best!" Yuno cheered with sparkling eyes full of yearning.

"Ha ha ha. Can't betray the expectations of my cute junior." Alvin smiled wryly and slowly readied her rapier. "So, Sir Sid. Let's start the practice."

"Yeah, come at me with everything you have. The more you spit blood, the stronger you'll become," he said with a grin, then took his usual low stance, his hands empty.

And then...

"Ooooooh!"

"Hyaaaaa!"

"Haaaaa!"

All the Second Squires attacked Sid from every direction.

Dusk had come, lighting the ground in red and stretching all the shadows. The lonely chirping of a crow echoed in the sky. The training of the Blitze class had come to its end for the day.

The Second and First Squires were all exhausted by the harsh training, lying on the ground unconscious. No, it wasn't everyone...

"Haa...haa...haaa..."

Only Alvin, though prostrated on the ground, had managed to stay conscious. It might have been thanks to her willpower as royalty.

“You’re really a genius when it comes to Will, Alvin.” Sid stood next to her and put a towel on her head. “There’s no waste in the way you burn your Will, making it very efficient. Thanks to that, your mana and stamina recover fast, and it’s harder for you to get tired.”

“R-Really...?”

“Yeah. In terms of pure stamina, Christopher is above you, but for drawn-out battles where you need to take a breather at important points, you’re better. So when it comes to war, you’re the strongest, in a way.”

“Th-Thank...haaa...cough...you...” She was happy to be praised by Sid but couldn’t give a proper answer.

“Well, that changes depending on the situation. The strongest isn’t the same for foot-soldier battles, duels, pitched battles, jousting matches, surprise attacks, and such. So, yeah, it’s meaningless to discuss who is the strongest. Still...” He glanced at all the unconscious Second Squires one by one and said with deep emotion, “You really became strong in a short time.”

“R-Really? We didn’t make you draw your sword, though...” Alvin said, looking at the obsidian iron sword hanging at Sid’s lower back.

“Don’t worry. I’m sure you’ll manage to do it one day. Also, a dead person like me can’t progress anymore, but living people like you can. Maybe my retirement isn’t that far off.”

“Sir Sid...”

“But don’t tell Tenko. After all, she gets carried away easily.”

“Aha ha ha... She just gets in high spirits because she’s happy when you praise her.” Alvin chuckled, remembering how her noble-tail friend tried to look unconcerned, but her tail was always swaying when in front of Sid recently. She also remembered fondly, as if thinking of something precious, how everyone in the class looked at them.

“What is it?” Sid asked, noticing the change in Alvin’s expression. “You seem really happy with that smile on your face.”

“Huh? Ah... You saw it.” Alvin scratched her cheek, embarrassed. “Yes, I’m

happy.”

Sid stayed silent, listening to her.

“I’m a girl, and yet fate has decided to make me live as a man to become king. This is already difficult in itself, and yet, there are also the facts that the Knight Order is weakening, the three ducal houses don’t want to cooperate, and the royal court’s power is getting more and more restrained. When my father died, I truly didn’t understand what I needed to do to protect this country... I was always anxious and insecure, secretly crying by myself.”

Sid watched her as she talked.

“Still, I clenched my teeth, thinking that even if only one step at a time, I could become stronger. I created the Blitze class as my father’s will asked, then I got irreplaceable friends, and then I met you, Sir Sid. We all did our best to overcome hardships, and finally, we’re now here...”

Sid was still silent.

“Yuno and the others joined our class and decided to support me even knowing I’m just the prince of the weak royal family. Though there are still frictions between factions, Louise, Johan, and Olivia are getting over them and might become our friends. Even the country’s top brass is starting to recognize me, and the number of people helping the royal family is increasing. Same for the citizens. More and more are supporting me. There are still lots of problems, such as the northern demon kingdom, the surrounding countries, our domestic public order, the monsters, and so on... Still, I’m starting to see a little hope and a bright future...or at least, I feel like I can.”

Sid didn’t say anything.

“Somehow, everything started going well since you came, Sir Sid. Aha ha, everything is thanks to you, then.”

“You’re wrong,” Sid, who had been listening quietly until now, suddenly said.

“Sir Sid?”

“Knights can’t do anything by themselves. Knights are the power of the king and are here to pave the path their king desires. If you think that everything

started going well since I came, then it's all thanks to your determination and your actions. You should be proud of yourself."

Hearing his words, Alvin's eyes moistened.

"I'm really glad to have met you in this era, Sir Sid..." she muttered, hanging her head.

He was the knight she adored because of all the stories her father had told her since she was little. In the stories, Sid was always strong and cool, a knight among knights—the greatest one. Long before meeting him, Alvin had always been in love with the Sid in the stories. She had always dreamed of him becoming her knight. And that childish dream had miraculously come true.

However, there was something she found unfortunate...

"Umm, Sir Sid."

"Yeah?"

"You really won't participate at the Premier Chevalier tournament during the coming Holy Spirit's Advent Festival?"

"I won't. I'm not interested," Sid replied as he shrugged his shoulders.

The Holy Spirit's Advent Festival was a traditional event happening on the first day of spring. During it, people prayed for peace to Éclair, the fairy god of light, and one of the ceremonies was the Premier Chevalier tournament. Knights who received Éclair's protection fought fair and square and showed their valor as an offering to Éclair, and the winner of the tournament received the title of Premier Chevalier until the next year. It was proof of being the strongest knight in the kingdom and the greatest honor for a knight. The winner also represented the kingdom as the strongest knight to other countries, so every year, all the kingdom's knights fought with martial arts and fairy magic to become the Premier Chevalier.

However, Sid wasn't interested in such an honor. No matter how many times Alvin asked, his answer didn't change.

"...Can I ask why?"

"Being the kingdom's strongest or greatest knight doesn't mean much when

being the 'strongest' and 'greatest' changes depending on the situation. So, yeah, I don't really feel much appeal to the title. What's more, being the Premier Chevalier means being the kingdom's face, meaning more duties and work. Rather than using my time for that, I'd rather train you guys and make you stronger. To me, that's way more meaningful."

"Aha ha, that's so like you, Sir Sid."

If old knights heard him, they'd be furious... she thought.

"Also...well, it'd be impossible. It'd be pretty bad if I participated."

Alvin groaned, understanding what he meant. He was the strongest knight of the legendary era, Sid Blitze the Barbarian. His strength and courage were now well-known, and for better or worse, his influence was immense. The three ducal houses, who were against the royal family, were already very cautious about Sid's every single move. If Sid became the Premier Chevalier and became even more influential, the three ducal families might fear Alvin's power and start taking extreme actions, which might truly break the country. Even if there were lots of problems, the kingdom's defense and administration couldn't go on without the three ducal houses. The current situation being somehow stable, Sid thought it was better not to provoke them more than necessary. Sid wasn't only strong, he also had a good political sense.

"Still, why do you want me to participate in the Premier Chevalier tournament so much, Alvin? You should also understand that it'd be bad if I do, right?" Sid asked, curious.

"W-Well..." Alvin was at a loss for words.

After all, the reason was trifling. She had admired Sid since she was little, and now he was her knight. So she wanted everyone to know and recognize that her knight was the greatest of them all. Basically, it was just the cute and selfish wish of a maiden in love.

"I-It's nothing... Aha ha ha..." She dodged the question, making Sid cock his head. "Well then, I should go wake everyone." She stood up. "Anyway, I'm truly grateful, Sir Sid. As long as you are by my side, I can believe that everything will go well and that the kingdom will have a bright future."

Sid stayed silent.

“So please, continue to take care of us from now on, Sir Sid,” she said and went to wake up her collapsed friends.

“Everything will go well, huh...” Sid muttered as he watched her.

Suddenly, he looked to the sky. He could see lots of birds flying from west to east in the sunset. They were ryno birds and usually lived in the western part of the continent. While they did migrate between west and east, it generally didn’t happen at this time of the year...unless something happened to them, something that drove them away from their habitat. Moreover, to Sid, these birds always had been the bad omens announcing mayhem in the legendary era.

He watched the ominous ryno birds for a while, then...

“A storm is brewing,” he whispered.

—

A few days later, Sid’s predictions came true.

A certain man showed up in the Kingdom of Calvania, and the country fell into a crisis.

Chapter 2: Crisis

“Prince! Prince Alvin! This is an emergency!”

In the early afternoon a few days later, as the students of the Blitze class trained fiercely under Sid to become great knights, a cabinet minister from the royal court suddenly appeared with a troubled expression and reported something truly shocking.

“An emissary from the Dragnir Empire?!”

“Y-Yes!”

After changing her clothes in her room, Alvin listened to the cabinet minister as they briskly walked through the castle’s hallway toward the audience room on the top floor. With her were Sid, as her guard, and Tenko, as her aide.

“He wouldn’t listen to us and forcefully entered the audience room. We would love to arrest and execute such a rude man, but...if he really is from the Dragnir Empire, we cannot treat him poorly, so...”

“Yeah, it would be bad. I know it was a troublesome matter for you. You did your best,” Alvin said as she hastened her pace with an unpleasant feeling.

“What is the Dragnir Empire?” Tenko asked.

“The large militant country that’s currently controlling the west side of the continent,” Sid answered. “To know the situation of this era, I quickly went through the documents in the castle’s reference room and learned about it there. It’s an imperial state possessing a territory three times larger than the Kingdom of Calvania. I’m kinda impressed that the savage tribes who always found a reason to attack us during the legendary era managed to create such a great country in the past thousand years.”

“O-Oh?”

“Anyway, it’s the typical centralized authoritarian imperialism that puts

wealth and military strength above everything. They declared that to fight against monsters and the northern demon country, a truly strong country needed to unify and rule the whole world, so they started to annex the surrounding minor countries and expand their territory. Jeez, their barbaric nature hasn't changed since the legendary era."

"Oh, so that's how it is! You're so knowledgeable, master! As expected from you!" Tenko praised Sid with a smile.

"Hey, Alvin..." Sid said.

"I know... I regret letting Tenko train as much as she wanted and never having her study." Alvin sighed. "Still, why send an emissary now? The empire signed a treaty with the previous king, and there is a regular summit conference, but it's too soon for that..." she said anxiously.

"Yeah, that's suspicious," Sid muttered. "Alvin, be careful, and don't let your guard down. If you deal with him the wrong way, it might become a big problem for the kingdom."

"...I know." She nodded meekly.

They reached the top level of the Calvania Castle and arrived in front of the audience room. Alvin pushed the double door open, and they entered.

"Stand up! You might be the emissary of a major country, but that doesn't allow you to be so insolent!"

The first thing Alvin heard when entering was the angry voice of Isabella, the chief of the Ladies of the Lake as well as the highest consul taking care of government affairs instead of the king.

The audience room looked like a luxurious hall. A red carpet was spread from the entrance to the throne, and on each side were the cabinet ministers and the three dukes. As for the empire's emissary, he was on top of the stairs, where Alvin should sit—the throne. Moreover, he was showing astonishingly bad behavior by hiding his face with a hood, crossing his legs, and resting his chin in his hand with his elbow on the armrest. Around him were a few knights who seemed to be his guards. Their armor and mantles used a black and red

tone, the characteristics of the Imperial Knight Order.

“Stand up and descend! What you are doing is a serious diplomatic issue!” Isabella shouted, flushed with anger. Being punctilious about manners, she couldn’t tolerate the conduct of the man, even if he was the emissary of a major country.

But the man didn’t care and ignored her reprimand. “Hmph. I don’t need to tell my name or show my face to a servant like you. In the first place, a suitable seat is needed for a suitable status, right? Then I should sit here. Why are you so dissatisfied?”

“Y-You...!” Isabella reached the peak of her rage, seeing how unashamed the man was.

“Isabella!” Alvin called her.

Finally noticing Alvin’s arrival, Isabella shut her mouth.

“I don’t mind. He took the trouble of coming from the far west and must be tired. We should make him feel welcome.” She walked toward the man boldly, then once in front of him, she firmly glared at him. “Is the throne comfortable?”

“Yeah, it’s great. I like it.”

“I’m glad it pleases you. But that’s it. Until now I was half-joking, but I won’t permit it anymore. If you continue to insult my country like that, I swear on the royal family’s dignity that I will kill you here and send your head back to your country. What is your reply?”

The man cackled. “I see. So you accept my insolence and show your pride and resolve as a king at the same time. I heard you were just a puppet for the three dukes, but you’re quite good.”

The man stood up. He glared back at Alvin and didn’t kneel, showing that he was of the same standing, making the tension in the air grow.

The man watched Alvin as if appraising her, then he said, “I *like* you, Prince Alvin.”

The next instant, Alvin felt a terribly unpleasant chill. If she had to describe the sensation, it was like the sense of danger and fear prey felt when

confronted with a predator.

Not caring about Alvin and the others' bewilderment, the man removed the hood that hid the upper part of his face, revealing his identity.

"What?!" Everyone exclaimed in surprise.

Alvin could only stare in wonder at the face of the emissary. He was a good-looking man with blond hair like the mane of a lion. He seemed to be a few years older than Alvin, probably just a little over twenty, but the presence he emanated was far above his age—it was the presence of a conqueror.

Alvin knew him. She had met him once when the kingdom and the empire's armies did a combined training. He was...

"You are...the imperial prince, Your Highness Wolf Noll Dragnir!"

He was the western Dragnir Empire's prince with the highest right of succession. After his father, the emperor, fell ill, he took control of the country and its domestic affairs. He was the preeminent person of the military faction, the one who promoted imperialism, and the actual ruler of the empire. He was Wolf, the Imperial Golden Wolf.

"Impossible... Why are you here?!" Alvin screamed, not being able to hide her shock.

"I said it, no? I'm an emissary." Wolf grinned boldly. "Let's start talking, Prince. Naturally, the subject is about my empire and your kingdom...about their futures."

Right at this instant, in this place, the kingdom got dragged into a chaotic storm.

In the western part of Calvania's royal family's direct territory was the Langrissa Fort. It was huge and sturdy, with tall ramparts sandwiched between the northern and southern mountain ranges, making it a natural stronghold easy to defend and hard to attack. It was an essential checkpoint on the route connecting the kingdom east and west, as well as an important place protecting the west part of the royal family's direct territory.

“I’m bored...” Ike—a soldier keeping watch around the Langrissa Fort from its watchtower—yawned, still feeling a little cold from the remains of winter.

“Hey, you’re way too relaxed, Ike,” Roy, his colleague, chided. “You know how important it is to protect this place. It’s the last line of defense in case the empire decides to invade the kingdom.”

“I know that, but it’s not like anything is going to happen...” Ike yawned again. “I mean, the previous king signed a nonaggression treaty and made a military alliance with them, no?”

“Well, yeah, but...”

“Then they won’t attack us. Man, I’d rather have been sent to the north where the demon kingdom and the monsters are. I became a soldier to protect this country, not to do nothing here...”

However, just as Ike was talking about his patriotism...

“Wait... What’s that?” Roy said, pointing far away.

“Hmm? Why do you look so pale?” Ike took a telescope and observed where Roy was pointing at. What he saw through the lens was a truly unbelievable sight. “What?! Th-That’s impossible!”

He saw an army. A large number of soldiers and knights, enough to fill the horizon, were walking toward the Langrissa Fort.

“That flag...it’s the main army of the Dragnir Empire! What’s happening?! Why are they here?!”

“It can only be one thing! They’re attacking us!”

“No way! What about the nonaggression treaty?!”

“I don’t know! We have to immediately report to the captain!” Roy said as he went to descend the watchtower.

“This fort is really sturdy! If we stay confined, we should be able to hold...on...” Ike’s words trailed off. “Wait...you serious? This must be a joke,” he muttered with a trembling voice, full of despair. “W-We’re done... This fort is done for...”

“Wh-What did you see, Ike?!”

“You know how this telescope is a magic tool given to us by the Ladies of the Lake?”

“Y-Yeah...”

“And that you can see the number of fairy swords the enemy army has?”

“Yeah, I know! Stop beating around the bush!” Roy shouted, not understanding what Ike was getting at.

“They... They all have one.”

“Huh?”

“Not just the knights. Even the soldiers have one! They *all* have fairy swords!”

A flock of ryno birds passed above the heads of the dumbfounded soldiers.

At the same time, at Calvania Castle:

“What do you mean by that, Prince Wolf?” Alvin asked stiffly.

They had left the audience room and were now in the conference room. Alvin and Wolf were both facing each other, separated by a long and luxurious table. The room was filled with tension, and the reason was the message given by Wolf as an emissary. Its content was unbelievable, making the cabinet ministers and Isabella ghastly pale, and even Tenko, who didn’t understand anything about politics, was dumbfounded, her mouth wide open.

“Hmm...” Only Sid stayed calm next to Alvin, watching over how things would go.

“Hmph. I thought I was clear and succinct. Why don’t you understand, Prince Alvin? It shouldn’t be a problem for someone as wise as you,” Wolf said with a bold smile as he received Alvin’s sharp glare with composure. “Should I repeat myself?”

“No need. That’s not what I’m asking. What I want to know is your motive.” Seeing how composed Wolf was, Alvin sharpened her glare even more. “If I had

to sum up what you said, it'd be something like this: 'Become our vassal state.' I want to know why you would say that out of the blue."

"Literally as I said." He chuckled. "From today, the Kingdom of Calvania will become vassal to the Dragnir Empire, and the Calvanian royal family must swear absolute obedience to our imperial family. The empire will control the kingdom... That's all. My words are those of the emperor and the collective opinion of the whole empire. But don't worry, I won't treat the royal family and the current high officials badly. Suitable posts will be given to you."

"As if I'd accept such nonsense!" Alvin shouted and struck the table. "There's no way I'd accept the unreasonable demand of giving you reign over my country!"

"You don't understand, Prince Alvin. This is absolutely necessary for the future of this world." Wolf stood up and talked calmly. "As you already know, this world is slowly heading toward its destruction because of the northern demon kingdom of Dachnesia."

Alvin gasped when she heard Dachnesia.

"Because the Demon King cursed that land in the past, it's covered in snow and ice all year round, making it uninhabitable. Well, not that it prevents the dark knights of the Dark Order of Opus from using it as a base to increase their military strength. Of course, you already know of their maneuvers and evil deeds in the whole continent, right?"

Alvin gritted her teeth. Wolf was right. The Dark Order of Opus had provoked countless tragedies. The capital of Calvania had been on the verge of being destroyed, and Tenko's homeland, Tenkagekoku, had, in fact, *been* destroyed. Similar incidents had also happened everywhere in the world.

"If we were to believe the rumors, the Dark Order of Opus is trying to call for the advent of a second Demon King, different from the one killed by the Holy King Arthur in the past. They apparently already found a successor."

"What?!"

"If this goes on, it's a matter of time before a new Demon King appears... If it does happen, the world will be plunged into death and winter, and it will create

a great war, like in the legendary era. It'd be too late, then." Wolf waved his hand and glared at everyone. "So before that, we must destroy the northern demon kingdom, the Dark Order of Opus, and the Demon King's successor. We must unify the whole continent under a single country, under a strong leader, and face the great evil threatening the world. You understand that, right, Prince?"

"And that's why you're asking the kingdom to become the empire's vassal state?"

"Exactly," Wolf replied with a bold smile. "My Dragnir Empire is currently the continent's strongest country. And as the one ruling it, I'm standing at the top of the world. Then it's natural that everything in this world should be serving me, no?" Wolf was overflowing with self-confidence. He solemnly believed that it was the proper way for the world to be.

Alvin stayed silent for a while, biting her lips, then, gathering her resolve, she said, "If you'd allow me, Your Highness, I have something to say."

"What? I permit you to speak."

"Because we're allies and it'd count as interference in your domestic affairs, I couldn't say it until now, but your plan to unify the world that you're so adamant about is a deception."

Hearing Alvin's firm words made Wolf twitch an eyebrow, and his retainers stirred.

"You're using the mighty power of your empire to forcefully annex the surrounding minor countries and powerful clans. You basically trample on their homelands and their pride."

Wolf stayed silent.

"The world is made of many races, tribes, nations, cultures, and religions. There's no way it'd go well to force them under the same banner. You're so rational that you're neglecting people's feelings. You're making a great mistake if you think that people will yield to you if you use power and fear against them."

Wolf didn't reply.

“What people need is coexistence. They must accept and respect each other, and not deny the differences between their cultures and races. It’s by patiently searching for a way to make this happen, without giving up, that the world can be truly unified. And when people come together, they ultimately become a nation. Forcing people under a single country and a single ruler isn’t unifying the world. It’s making a compromise.”

“That’s too lax. It seems we have different ideas about the role of a ruler,” Wolf said with composure.

“Also, I know what kind of treatment the countries you annexed receive, Prince Wolf.”

Wolf kept silent.

“This is the adverse effect of your policy—based on wealth and military strength—going too far. Your vassal states are imposed heavy taxations, and their youths are all conscripted. Their situation is such that it’s even hard for them to earn their daily bread. Even as we speak right now, countless innocents are starving and suffering.”

“But that’s for the world,” Wolf replied, unwavering. “You’re a king too, so you should understand. A king needs the resolve to make a small sacrifice for the greater good of the world.”

“A small sacrifice?!” Alvin reflexively raised her voice. “There’s no way that the suffering of countless innocent people is a small sacrifice! You should have searched for another way! Rather than taking the easy way and controlling everything through power, you should have tried to think more and come up with another method! That’s what being a king, standing above people, means!”

In front of Alvin’s anger, Wolf’s countenance changed for the first time.

“Anyway. We won’t obey. As a member of the proud and noble royal family of Calvania, I can’t accept a plan that would make this kingdom’s people starve. I ask you to leave, now, Your Highness Wolf Noll Dragnir.”

“Oh? You’re saying that even knowing my...the Dragnir Empire’s power? Your Highness Alvin Noll Calvania.”

“Of course. What you asked is the worst national disgrace, like throwing mud at the Holy King and my ancestors. I don’t know a man more insolent and arrogant than you. Even if we declared war on your country to wipe out this disgrace, I’m sure the other nations would become our allies. That’s just how much you...the empire did. Still, I’m willing to forgive you and forget this discussion happened. However, I swear on this country’s dignity and the honor of the royal family that I won’t permit it anymore. If you insult us again, the kingdom’s prized five thousand fairy knights and fifty thousand soldiers will speak through their swords,” Alvin said with resolution.

The tension in the room reached its peak, and everyone held their breath as silence reigned. However...

“Ha ha ha...” Someone broke the heavy silence with a delighted laugh. “Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!” It was Wolf. “I’m *liking* you even more, Prince Alvin!” he said, glancing at Alvin.

The next instant, Alvin felt a chill run down her spine, feeling the same physiological fear and danger as earlier. She felt like a frog being glared at by a snake. Wolf looked at her as if appraising her, and she tried her best to hide how she felt.

“Even knowing my power...the empire’s power, you didn’t step back, nor did you try to curry favor. Instead, you’re fighting back for your people and pride, with the resolve to bear everything on your thin shoulders. That’s great, Prince Alvin. You are the most fleeting, sublime, and beautiful flower. I want someone like you. I want to make you mine and make you serve me. You have more worth than thousands of treasures.”

“What?!” Alvin was reaching the end of her patience, being insulted by Wolf even after repeatedly warning him.

“Th-This man... What is he...?!” Tenko trembled, her face flushed with anger. She was doing her best to hold back the impulse to draw her katana.

As for Sid, he stayed silent, his arms folded, as he was watching over how things would turn out.

“I said I wouldn’t forgive any more insults, Prince Wolf.” Alvin stood up and glared at him with cold eyes.

“And? So what?”

“I ask for you to withdraw your previous remarks and apologize.”

“And what will happen if I refuse?”



*“Then I...” won’t do anything and just politely ask you to leave as I think about the future relationship between our countries—*was what Alvin was thinking, judging that the discussion was a waste of time and would go nowhere. But as she was going to speak her mind, a messenger entered the conference room, panting.

“Prince Alvin! It’s an emergency!”

“What is it?! We currently have an important guest!”

“I-I am fully aware! I will accept any punishment for my rudeness later! However, there is a report I must absolutely make no matter what! This is an emergency for the kingdom!” The messenger kneeled. His face was pale, full of fear and despair. It was evident the situation wasn’t normal.

Alvin stiffened, not knowing what to say.

“I don’t mind. You can listen to his report, Prince,” Wolf said with a knowing smile.

Alvin looked at him bitterly. Then she turned toward the messenger.

“Speak.”

“Yes, sir!” The knight nodded, took a deep breath, then said, “Our western defense...the Langrissa Fort fell!”

“What?!” Alvin and all the cabinet ministers and knights in the room were shocked to hear this.

“That’s impossible! It’s an impregnable fort with Éclair’s divine protection! Who is the enemy?!” Alvin urged him to answer.

“The Dragnir Empire...” the knight answered, his voice trembling.

“...What?”

“The enemy is the Imperial Knight Order of the Dragnir Empire!”

Hearing the knight’s unbelievable report, Wolf grinned boldly in triumph.

“That’s...impossible...”

“It can’t be...”

“How could the Langrissa Fort fall...?”

Confusion and agitation spread among the cabinet ministers like a disease. The Langrissa Fort was the last line of defense against the western empire of Dragnir. In the past, they often had skirmishes, but the fort had stopped all their attacks and was called the kingdom’s strongest shield. However, if it fell, the kingdom would have nothing else to protect the capital. In other words, the Langrissa Fort falling meant that the Kingdom of Calvania had lost to the Dragnir Empire.

“Prince Wolf!” Alvin glared at him, realizing it had been his plan far too late.

“I told you, no?” he replied with a delighted smile. “The kingdom will become a vassal state to the empire. War is something you finish before you start it, Prince Alvin.”

“What?!”

“I admit that you have the qualities of a king, Prince. You are strong, noble, and beautiful. As you grow, I’m sure everyone will eventually bow and pledge allegiance to you. Your path is full of light, and you are the embodiment of an ideal king.” He paused an instant, then continued. “However, put in another way, you’re only a beautiful flower. Your beauty charms people and draws them near. They praise you and pamper you... No, they have to, as you are only a transient flower that wouldn’t bloom otherwise. You were raised in a closed garden with care and love... That’s who you are, Prince. Of course, that’s also a form of kingship, but it’s useless in these turbulent times. A king in a chaotic era must eat and absorb his surroundings, making them his flesh and blood. He must be an insectivorous and poisonous flower.”

Alvin was speechless. No, everyone was.

“I see,” a man said, breaking the silence. “That’s how you do it, Young Wolf. You’re very careful and thoroughly prepared. You’re not just all talk. You’re quite the man.”

“Who are you?” Wolf asked in a low tone.

However, the man—Sid—ignored him.

“Thinking about it, it’s quite strange. The Langrissa Fort is indeed the

breakwater protecting the capital, but farther west is the territory of Duke Anthalo, in charge of the border's defense. No matter how fast the empire invasion is, a report should have come from Duke Anthalo's Green Knights before a knight from the royal army at the fort could. So tell me, where are the Green Knights, and what are they doing? Why did they let the Imperial Knight Order go through their territory?"

Duke Anthalo didn't answer.

"Also, Duke Durande's Red Knights went on an expedition to the east to deal with monsters, and Ortol's Blue Knights to the north as a precaution against the demon kingdom. This is quite strange for you to be so thoughtful, considering you're always trying to stand in Alvin's way. And for the Langrissa Fort to fall just when the capital is practically unprotected... Ha ha ha, isn't that a little too much? What do you think?"

Both Duke Durande and Duke Ortol didn't reply.

"Haven't you been strangely docile since Young Wolf came? Didn't you want to rule over the kingdom instead of the royal family? The kingdom is in grave danger, so shouldn't you be complaining loudly like usual? Why are you so silent?"

Hearing Sid's outspoken words, the cabinet ministers and knights in the room stirred.

"Huh? Wait... You don't mean..."

"It can't be..."

"No, that's impossible... There is no way that..."

Agitation, confusion, suspicion. Different emotions spread through the room like an illness.

The words Sid spoke—even though he usually didn't talk—held a certain meaning behind them. And, considering the situation, if they were true, that would explain everything that was currently happening.

"No...wait..." Alvin turned toward the three dukes with a pale face. "True, I know you are thinking of weakening the royal family to take our place and rule

the kingdom. Still, surely, you wouldn't do something as prideless as selling your homeland to the enemy..." Alvin couldn't hide her shock as the three dukes were still staying silent.

"We're comrades under the banner of the same country, protecting the people of the same country, and trying to create a better future for this country," Sid said. "Even if our opinions and our aims are different, these should at least be true. So please, explain yourselves, Duke Durande, Duke Ortol, Duke Anthalo. Just say that it's unjust suspicion from the uncivilized Barbarian, laugh it off, and let me apologize. Please... Don't make me scorn *their* descendants."

And yet, the three dukes—the three pillars of the Kingdom of Calvania—stayed silent.

"...What a shame." Sid closed his eyes in regret and sighed.

Then, as everyone in the room was confused and bewildered...

"This is unfortunate, Prince Alvin." Duke Durande, who had stayed silent until now, stood up. "This era is heading toward chaotic times... A weak king like you won't be able to give a bright future to this country."

Duke Ortol stood up too. "Only a strong king, a strong ruler, can lead the people and the world."

Then Duke Anthalo got up too and thrust sharp words at Alvin. "We are fed up with you, a prince who disregards long-standing nobles like us and uses the power of the Barbarian to do whatever you want like a tyrant. My apologies, but we are truly thinking about this country's future and the people. As such, we have decided to pledge allegiance to Prince Wolf of the Dragnir Empire."

Alvin, Isabella, Tenko, the cabinet ministers, and all the knights from the royal faction were speechless. The three ducal houses had betrayed them. Faced with such unbelievable truth, it was as if time froze in the room.

"So, you understand, now? That's what being a true king means, Prince Alvin." Wolf laughed in triumph. "War isn't only about charisma and leading an army to fight the enemy head-on. Only winning before the fight starts will make you an invincible and undefeated country with a strong king. Thanks to that, I can make the kingdom mine with almost no sacrifice or damage."

“You bastard!” a dozen knights from the royal faction shouted as they drew their swords.

They were full of rage as they pointed their bloodlust at Wolf. Though they didn’t have fairy swords, they were adequately trained and more than double the number of guards Wolf had. Normally, Wolf would be the one in a desperate situation. And yet...

“Oh? You want to fight here?” Wolf smiled boldly. “All right, you are the rude ones for drawing your swords first.” He raised his hand calmly, signaling his guards. And, just as they drew their swords...

“Wait.”

A flash of light and a terrific thunderclap resounded in the room as someone appeared between both camps, interrupting the critical situation. The man—Sid—raised his left hand toward Wolf, and his right hand toward the kingdom’s knights, stopping them. Everyone’s anger and fervor had been diminished by the air-bending pressure he emanated.

“Both sides should calm down. It’d be foolish to fight here.”

The knights gasped.

“If you wound Young Wolf, it’ll give the empire an excuse for their attack. I value the indignation your loyalty to the country and the royal family has caused, but it’s a double-edged sword that could destroy them. If you truly think about the kingdom, you should sheathe your feelings in the scabbards of your hearts.”

Hearing Sid’s sound argument, the knights stepped back, frustrated.

“Also,” Sid glanced in Wolf’s direction, “if I didn’t stop you, you’d all be dead by now.”

Before anyone noticed, a knight had appeared in front of Wolf to protect him. They wore white armor with a white mantle, which was completely different from the black and red of the other imperial knights. Their eyes, which could be seen through the visor of their full-face helmet, had a sharp glint to them. And, more than anything, their presence exuded such a pressure that it filled the whole room.

Everyone besides Sid started to suffocate, feeling a prickle on their skin and a chill down their spines. Their legs were trembling, and some even fell to their knees. In that instant, they all understood they couldn't win. Their souls screamed that it was impossible. The moment they would point their sword at the white knight, they would be killed in a heartbeat.

"Th-That knight..." Tenko who, while still trembling, had managed to stay up through sheer will, shouted. "That knight is the same as master! I'm sure of it! This sensation... He's around the same level as a legendary era's knight!"

"What?!" The ministers and knights exclaimed in shock and despair.

Sid stayed silent and, as if confirming Tenko's words, he took a low stance with his hand hovering over his obsidian iron sword's hilt, ready to draw it at any moment. That meant the mysterious white knight had made Sid wary enough for him to prepare his strongest weapon.

Sid, protecting Alvin behind him, and the mysterious white knight, standing imposingly before Wolf, stared at each other, making the pressure in the room exponentially heavier.

"I apologize for their rudeness toward your lord. However, step back. If you don't, I won't either," Sid warned the white knight.

Did they not hear Sid, or maybe they didn't intend to listen to him? A small chuckle could be heard from inside the white knight's helmet. Then, silently, they slowly stretched their hand toward their sword at their hips. And, just as the tension in the room was going to reach its limits...

"Stop, white knight," Wolf said, making the white knight dispel the pressure they exuded and step back.

The tension in the air instantly dissipated.

Sid released his guard and stance as he silently watched the white knight respectfully stepping back.

Wolf glared at all the people who relaxed as if they just escaped from death, then turned toward Sid. "I see, so you're the rumored Barbarian. As expected of you, Prince Alvin, you own quite the knight. Though, he isn't as good as mine."

“Prince Wolf! Who is that knight behind you?!” Alvin asked, trying to stay resolute, though she couldn’t stop the sweat forming on her brow.

“Why are you so surprised? Even someone of your caliber has a knight suiting you, so of course, I’d have a better one, being of a higher caliber.”

Alvin gritted her teeth, faced with Wolf’s arrogance.

“Well then, let’s review the situation,” Wolf started, ignoring Alvin’s hateful glare. “As you already know, the capital’s last line of defense, the Langrissa Fort, fell to my Imperial Knight Order. The three pillars of the kingdom, the three ducal houses, submitted to me, and the majority of the kingdom’s fairy knights are on expeditions far away from here. Finally, the world’s strongest knight, far surpassing your trusted Barbarian, is on my side. You have lost everything, and nothing is protecting you anymore, Prince Alvin.”

Alvin grimaced, gritting her teeth even more.

“In such a situation, I’ll ask once again. Surrender, Prince Alvin. Kneel before me, and become one of my limbs, helping me to accomplish my supremacy. What is your reply?”

Alvin closed her eyes for a few seconds. Then, resolved, she said, “I refuse!”

Wolf opened his eyes wide.

“Indeed, though immoral, your opinion holds some truth. Maybe it’s necessary for the future of this world to unify everyone under a strong ruler. However, I am the king of the Kingdom of Calvania, and I’m protecting this country! I can’t ignore my people, who are struggling for a better tomorrow! There must be another method! As a king, I can’t choose the short, easy way and compromise like that!”

Wolf blinked in surprise, not expecting such an answer.

“I won’t serve you, Prince Wolf. I’ll never become yours. If you want this country...then kill me here and now!” Alvin declared, truly prepared to die.

The mysterious white knight being equal to Sid, and the three ducal families having turned against her, Alvin was now defenseless. She couldn’t flee, let alone fight. Also, provoking Wolf in such a situation meant death.

The three dukes grinned and sent a signal to call for their subordinates. More than twenty fairy knights rushed inside the conference room. Being fairy knights, they had fairy swords, allowing them to overwhelm the royal knights who didn't. There was now absolutely no way for Alvin to run away.

"A-Alvin!" Tenko shouted anxiously.

"Tenko... I'm sorry it came to this..." Alvin muttered. "Seems like it's the end for me. I made my decision. Because of my choice, the kingdom's people will experience hardships, so I can't just live shamelessly when I couldn't even protect them. That's all there is to it."

"N-No!" Tenko yelled as she put her hand on her katana's hilt.

"It's a royal decree. Don't resist. Surrender to the empire. That way you won't die with me here," Alvin ordered, making Tenko teary-eyed.

"Alvin—" Sid tried to move, but the white knight stood in his way, making him click his tongue with frustration.

The white knight wasn't someone Sid could deal with easily. The instant he would go by Alvin's side, the white knight would cut his back.

As everyone was nervously watching how things would unfold, Alvin drew her rapier and stabbed the floor. She put her hands on the pommel and majestically gazed at Wolf.

"Now, do as you like. As long as I'm alive, this country won't be yours."

If one watched carefully, they would notice that her hands were trembling slightly. Her eyes, however, were completely still.

"I see... So you resolved yourself to your fate for the nation." Duke Durande grinned and drew his fairy sword.

"This is very impressive of you, Prince." Duke Ortol drew her fairy sword too.

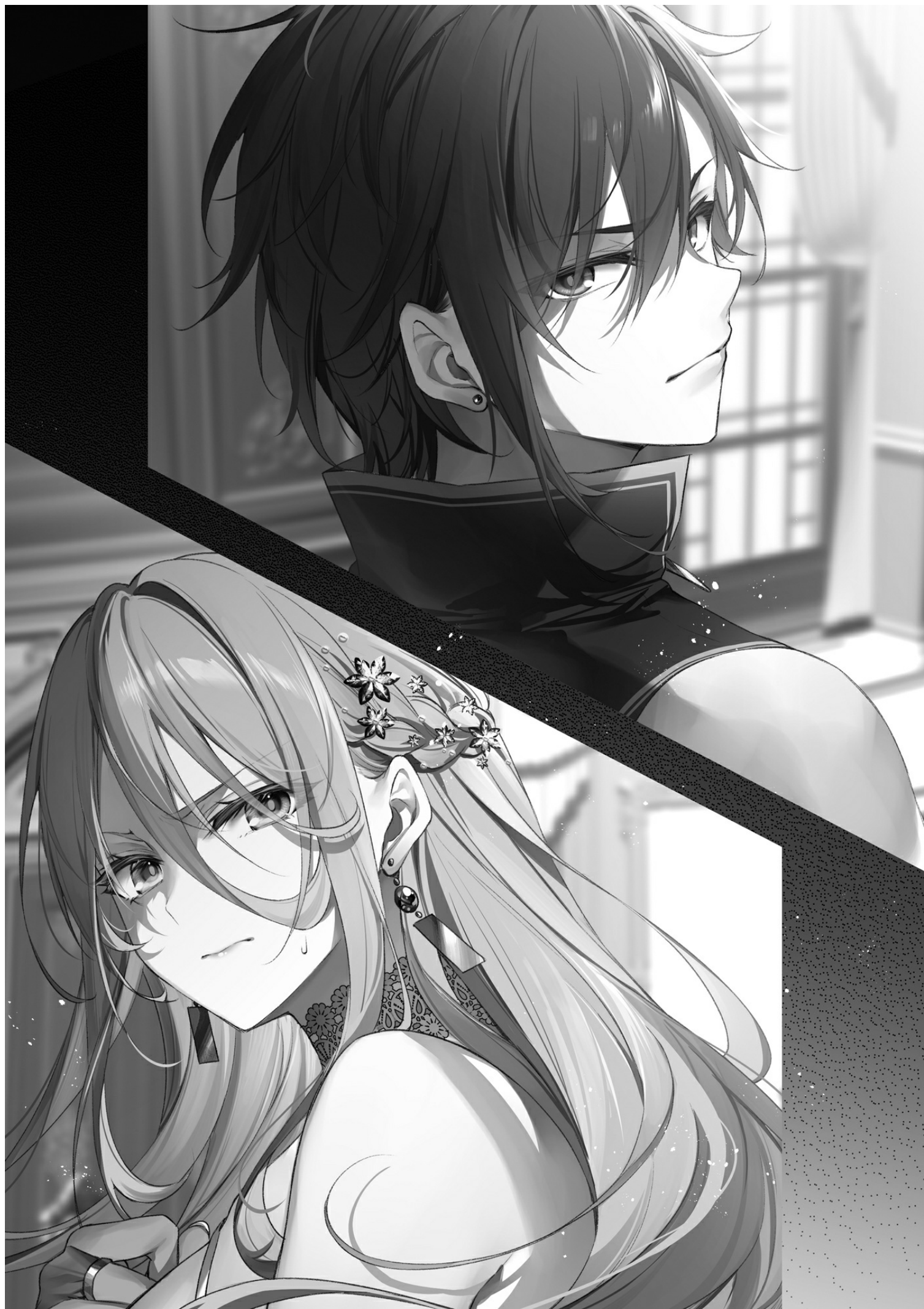
"In deference to your resolve, we will try to kill you without pain." Duke Anthalo also drew his.

The three dukes were all using Atzilt-rank fairy swords. Besides Sid, they were the three strongest knights in the kingdom.

Alvin stayed silent, having nothing more to add.

Sid exchanged looks with Isabella, who was distressed. *You get it, right, Isabella?*

Y-Yes... she nodded, understanding what Sid intended.



Sid thought the white knight's strength was tremendous, equal to—or perhaps even higher than—his. As such, he instantly decided to go save Alvin even at the price of being cut in the back. Then he would entrust her to Isabella and have them flee.

Sorry, Arthur, my friend... When I get to the other side, you can punch me as much as you want.

Sid waited for a chance to move, and, just when he found one and was going to act...

“Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!” Loud laughter cut the tension in the room. It was Wolf.

“What...?” Alvin said, dumbfounded.

Wolf, on the other hand, was delighted, as if he had just found the treasure he had searched for forever.

“As expected from you, Prince Alvin! I want to make you kneel before me even more! Besides, plucking you while you are still a beautiful flower and making you a bookmark in the history book about my supremacy would be too boring! So I'll give you a chance! Let's play a game!”

“A...game?”

“Yeah, a game. We'll ask the gods who has the highest caliber as king.” Wolf walked near the glaring Alvin and put his face near hers, calmly looking at her from above. “I heard that this country will soon have a certain traditional festival, the Holy Spirit's Advent Festival. And there, the Premier Chevalier tournament will occur to select the country's best knight in dedication to Éclair, right?”

“Yes...and?”

“Allow my knight to participate.”

“What?!” everyone exclaimed, surprised.

“If one of your knights manages to defeat mine in a match dedicated to Éclair, I'll give up and leave your country alone. However, if my knight wins against yours, and stands at the top...I'll have you kneel before me, pledge allegiance,

and become mine, Alvin. So, how about it? I don't think you have a reason to refuse in such a situation."

Just as Wolf said, Alvin didn't have any other choice. Wolf's mysterious white knight was here, and the Langrissa Fort had fallen. The kingdom was on its last stand. Wolf could just have Alvin killed here or capture her, pin a suitable crime on her, and execute her before the people. Then he would easily obtain the kingdom. As such, there shouldn't be any meaning to this game that he suggested.

Wolf started talking as if sensing Alvin's doubts. "Are you wondering what a king's caliber is? Well, it's based on the caliber of his knights. The more outstanding the knights are, the more outstanding the king is for having them serve him. So if my knight is better than yours, that means my caliber is higher than yours too. By proving it in front of Éclair, I'll make you understand the difference between us. Then, maybe that will make you want to kneel before me on your own?"

"And if I don't allow your knight to participate?"

"Then I'll just attack you and your country normally and destroy you," Wolf said indifferently.

"I don't understand..." Alvin shook her head. "Why, Prince Wolf...? Why are you so obsessed with making me kneel before you?"

"I told you, no? I like you."

That made Alvin even more confused. Indeed, having the king of the winning country recognize the ability of the king of the losing country and making them their retainer wasn't unheard of. However, Alvin wasn't king yet. Most of the politics and the kingdom's domestic affairs were dealt with by Isabella, the chief of the Ladies of the Lake. So the truly amazing one was Isabella, not Alvin. Even looking at Alvin as a knight, she was still far too inexperienced. She was nothing compared to Wolf's tremendous white knight. So, all things considered, Alvin couldn't understand why he was so obsessed with her.

Also... A certain thought came to Alvin. The way Wolf looked at her was different sometimes, making her uncomfortable. *It's as if he didn't see me as a man...* A chill ran down her spine. She shook her head to deny the possibility

she just imagined. *No, that's impossible! Only Isabella, Tenko, and Sir Sid know about that... It's a secret that nobody else should know!* If she didn't tell herself so, she would be so scared and anxious that she would fall to her knees. After all, if that was the case, Alvin's everything would break and crumble.

"So, what is your reply?" Wolf calmly asked the silent Alvin.

It was truly an unfair question. After all, if there was even just a little hope to save the kingdom and its people, then Alvin could only give one answer.

"Understood. I accept, Prince Wolf." She glared at him in defiance.

"Well said. But now that you've accepted, I'll have you respect our agreement. If your knight loses, you'll kneel before me."

"I know. I, Alvin Noll Calvania, a descendant of the Holy King, swear on my name. But it's the same for you, Prince Wolf. If my knight wins, you'll have to leave my country alone."

"Of course. But that won't happen."

They both glared at each other.

Thus, the tense audience between the two future kings ended.

Chapter 3: The Haughty Wolf

That day, the news of the Dragnir Empire invasion spread around the kingdom. No martial law would have been able to stop it from happening. In a short time, bewilderment and disorder spread through the country, and in particular, the capital.

“D-Did you hear?”

“Yeah... They say the empire’s army is at the capital’s door...”

“Wh-What are the knights doing?!”

“I-I heard that the three dukes feared for their lives and betrayed the kingdom!”

“How could they...?”

“I also heard that if we become a vassal state to the empire, they’ll impose heavy taxes on us, and we’ll be forced to conscript... It’s like being slaves of the suzerain state...”

“Yeah, I heard rumors too. Apparently, people in the minor countries that were annexed by the empire are starving to death.”

“What’ll happen to us...?”

“So Prince Alvin wasn’t up to par, huh...?”

The citizens’ anxiety continued to swell as they exchanged never-ending speculation and gossip.

And it wasn’t just them. The students of the Calvania Royal Fairy Knight Academy were the same.

“Seriously?! The empire seriously attacked?!” Christopher shouted, his voice echoing in the academy’s dining hall.

Currently, youths thinking about the future of their country were reunited in the dining hall and having unproductive debates. Naturally, the subject was the attack from the empire.

“B-But...didn’t the previous king Auld sign a nonaggression treaty with the empire?” Lynette said, teary-eyed.

“True. However, they have been acting strangely recently...or, at least, I thought so.” Elaine sighed and dropped her shoulders. “The ones who signed the treaty were the previous king, Auld, and the current emperor, Richard. I heard that Emperor Richard has been sick for the past few years and is not able to rule the empire anymore.”

“Instead, the one in charge is Prince Wolf.” Theodore pushed up his glasses with a serious expression. “He used the emperor’s illness as an opportunity to exile anyone who was against him and the imperial family, and he immediately seized full authority over the country. Rumors say that the reason the emperor is sick might be because the prince drugged him. That’s how much influence he has in the empire.”

“In the first place, he was an ambitious man—an extremist. The emperor is a moderate and prefers cooperating with other countries, but Prince Wolf is using the opportunity to aggressively push his plan to forcefully unify the continent,” Elaine added.

“And finally, this country too?! He’s so detestable!” Tenko said, clenching her fist with anger.

“Still...I think he’s impressive,” Theodore commented with a troubled expression.

“Wh-What?! Why are you praising the enemy, Theodore?!”

“Calm down. Don’t yell at me. I just said the objective truth.” Theodore shrugged his shoulders at Tenko, who was baring her sharp canines at him. “I’m sure that even the empire’s people were against invading other countries. Also, even if he has the power of the imperial family, his plan goes counter to that of the emperor, so there’s no way it’d be easy to convince everyone. And yet, the instant he replaced his father, he immediately unified the people’s will and started to invade other countries. At the same time, he saw the opening in our

kingdom's top brass, contacted the three dukes, and won them over. Finally, he has the guts to come ask for capitulation on his own, and the shrewdness to make the Langrissa Fort fall, tying our hands... He truly has the caliber of a supreme ruler. There aren't many people as suitable as him to stand at the top during war times."

"Grrr... Alvin could do it!" Tenko objected, frustrated.

"Unfortunately, at this rate, Alvin will be noted in future history books as a fool who had his retainers stolen by his enemy."

"Theodore! What are you saying?!" Tenko shouted, her face flushed with rage.

"We can't do anything about it! That's how history works! It's always written in a way that's convenient to the winner! Nobody cares about the loser's circumstances!" Theodore, who was usually calm, yelled back at Tenko. "I don't agree with the way the empire is doing things either! It's really pissing me off!"

Seeing Theodore so angry, everyone gasped and hung their heads.

"Those damn dukes! I knew they didn't like the royal family, but still! How could they betray the kingdom so easily? It's their freaking homeland! These damn traitors!" Christopher struck the table, and the impact echoed in the dining hall. Then he turned his head to the side. "Hey, did you guys know?" he said to a few legacy class students who were standing still with grave expressions.

"Of course not! Even we, squires from the three legacy classes under the three ducal houses, were surprised to hear that! We learned about it today!" Louise shouted back, angry that he would doubt her.

"From what I heard from above, apparently we're supposed to become part of the Imperial Knight Order as the three dukes' knights," Johan said calmly with a complicated expression.

Now that it had come to this, whether Sid won the Premier Chevalier tournament or not, the kingdom was fated to break. They all felt the coming of a terrible era.

"We're knights from the three ducal houses, so it'll inevitably end like that!"

Olivia was flustered and lost her calm, her face deathly pale.

“Olivia, Johan! You’re fine with that?! You know that’ll make you traitors, right?!” Christopher shouted.

“I know that! Really, I know! But...but...” Olivia started crying, holding her head in her hands.

The situation was such that they had only one choice. Olivia and Johan were the next heirs of renowned knight families. What they should do for themselves and their families in such a situation was decided from the start. They had something to protect and duties to shoulder.

“What about you all? What do you plan to do?” Elaine asked everyone else.

“Of course, I’m on Alvin’s side!” Tenko answered immediately without hesitation. “No matter what happens, I’m Alvin’s knight. I’ll fight and die for Alvin!”

“I think the same! I came here to serve the prince! So, no matter what happens, I’ll fight for him!” Yuno strongly nodded.

“Well, that’s how we think in the Blitze class.”

“Yes. After all, we didn’t have anywhere to go, and Alvin brought us all together. We have to return the favor.”

Hearing Christopher and Elaine’s words, Theodore snorted, and Lynette nodded so fast that her head looked like it might come off. They felt the same way.

“However...naturally, *you* would waver.” Elaine glanced at the other classes’ students.

Johan, Olivia, and even Louise gritted their teeth, not knowing what to do.

And, as the dining room became silent with a heavy atmosphere...

“Ga ha ha ha ha ha ha! You’re all idiots!” Loud, frivolous laughter resounded. It was a Second Squire from the Durande class—Gato. “Why are you even hesitating?! No matter how you think about it, this country is done for! If you can’t beat ’em, join ’em! I think it’s a great opportunity!”

“What?!”

“We can change sides to the Dragnir Empire under great conditions! It’s far more enticing to stand at the top than to stay loyal to this shabby country! I’m joining Duke Durande and the empire! Ga ha ha ha ha!”

“You little...!” Christopher stood up and grabbed Gato’s collar. “You’re serious when you say that?!”

“Ha! You bet I am! Got a problem with that?! I’m not a dog of the royal family like you guys! They’re just a sinking ship anyway!”

“You freaking idiot! It’s not just about the royal family! Use your head!” Christopher shouted. “Even a commoner like me understands! If the empire takes control, this country is going to become a mess! Of course, that means our homes too!”

For the first time, Gato acted flustered, a little sweat forming on his brow.

“Your home and your family are in this country, no?! And you’re fine with them becoming a mess?! You’re fine as long as you’re safe, and you don’t care about the rest?! You’re really fine with that?!”

“S-So what should I do?! You think you can go through such a shitty situation with just lip service?!”

Just as they were going to use their fists...

“Stop,” Elaine said, putting her fairy sword between them as they glared at each other.

Christopher gasped and stepped back, calming down.

“Tch, damn small fry...” Gato also calmed down and stepped back.

Elaine sheathed her sword. “Honestly, this is a very big and important watershed moment in our lives. I do not intend to say boorish things to you all. However, we should all choose a path that we won’t regret. Even if that means that, in the near future, we will have to fight against people we learned with. People we shared a meal with.”

Everyone in the dining hall stayed silent with gloomy expressions.

“Regardless...it will depend on the result of the Premier Chevalier tournament.”

“Yeah. Prince Wolf swore on the name of the imperial family. If he breaks his promise, that will stain the imperial family’s honor, and he’ll become the laughingstock of the continent,” Theodore added.

“S-So...if the kingdom wins...” Tenko started.

“Yes, in that case, the kingdom would stay independent. The problem is...can we win?” Elaine said.

Tenko’s ears stood up, and she shouted, “Of course, we can! We have master... We have the strongest knight of the legendary on our side! Master will surely participate if it’s for the kingdom’s sake! I don’t know who that white knight is, but he’s nothing against master!”

“You’re really an idiot...” Theodore sighed. “It’s not as simple as that. All the other countries know that we have Sir Sid and how crazy his strength is. And yet, Prince Wolf chose to use the Premier Chevalier tournament, something that should give us the advantage. Think about why he did that.”

“Maybe he has a secret plan to win...”

“Or that white knight is stronger than Sir Sid.”

It was hard to believe, but considering the rumors about Sid and the white knight’s exchange in the conference room, maybe it wasn’t impossible.

“Also,” Theodore pushed up his glasses again, then sighed and looked far away, “it’s just a guess, but I don’t think Alvin will let Sir Sid participate in the tournament.”

“Huh?! Why?” Tenko exclaimed, and she looked at Theodore, as did everyone else, waiting for an explanation.

—

At the same time, in the round-table conference room, the ministers and knights of the royal faction were in disorder.

“Let’s make Sir Sid participate in the Premier Chevalier tournament!”

“We can’t trust knights from the three ducal houses anymore!”

“We can only rely on Sir Sid now!”

“Indeed... Sir Sid, extolled as being the strongest in the legendary era, is the only one who can save us from this predicament!”

“Prince Alvin! Please, order your knight, order Sir Sid!”

“Order him to participate in the tournament and win!”

“With his strength, the country will be saved!”

“And then...”

Alvin listened silently to her retainers’ desperate pleas as if they were happening in a different world.

“Alvin...” Isabella, who understood how Alvin felt, looked at her profile with a pained expression.

However, the vassals didn’t notice them and just continued to talk.

“Still, I know this is inappropriate for the situation, but I’m really glad Sir Sid is Prince Alvin’s faithful knight!”

“Indeed! If he wasn’t there, who knows what would have happened?!”

“To pass down the secret art of revival so the future could use it on Sir Sid... As expected of the Holy King Arthur, great ancestor of the royal family!”

Since they knew of Sid’s strength, they were optimistic and couldn’t even imagine him losing. They thought that the country would be safe and in peace as long as Sid was there.

Alvin just kept listening to them silently.

“Still...the three dukes really astounded me!”

“Indeed! Those damn ingrate traitors! They forgot their gratitude to King Auld!”

“They were more docile when the king was alive! But the moment he died, they changed!”

“If King Auld were still alive, such a situation wouldn’t have happened! It truly

is a shame he died so young...”

“Yes, his death was too premature... His bravery and wisdom made him the perfect king...”

“Mmh... If only he were still alive...”

“Stop now,” Isabella rebuked the vassals, who were saying whatever they wanted. “There is no use speaking of someone already dead. Also, you are insulting Prince Alvin. Be careful with what you say.”

The vassals gasped, noticing what they had done.

“W-We apologize!”

“P-Please, forgive us!”

“W-We didn’t intend to look down on you, Prince!”

Their faces went pale.

“Don’t worry. I know. I don’t mind.”

“B-But...”

“Don’t worry. I’m fine...” Alvin smiled gently.

The ministers and knights currently in the room were all vassals who had sworn loyalty to the previous king and the royal family. Alvin knew them since she was a child and considered them family. So she knew how much they worked and how they gave their all for the kingdom. She couldn’t blame them. It was inevitable. After all, it was natural that people would rely on Sid—a true knight—and on the previous king Auld—a true king—when in a predicament. So it was inevitable that nobody would expect anything from Alvin herself.

“I’m taking a little break...” Alvin stood up.

“P-Prince...”

As everyone watched her, Alvin, whose shoulders looked somewhat slumped, left the room. Just when she passed the door, she muttered in a small voice nobody could hear, “In the end...I’m nothing... I’m worthless...”

Alvin loitered in the castle. She didn't actually think about where she was going, but her legs naturally walked toward a certain place—where the person she most wanted to meet would usually be.

Prince Wolf is really amazing... she thought as she slowly walked. Certainly, with the way he did things, he couldn't be considered honest. However, a king, a ruler, should take in both good and evil. That was one of the required qualities to have.

Thinking along those lines, how was Wolf? Certainly, the Dragnir Empire was the mightiest country on the continent, but even the Kingdom of Calvania was recognized as a powerful nation. If the empire tried to annex the kingdom by attacking from the front as it did with other countries, they both would suffer a lot of casualties, or worse, they would destroy each other. And yet, Wolf managed to find a way to make the kingdom his with minimal sacrifice. His foresight, his diplomatic and negotiation skills, his decisiveness, his charisma...they were all above the norm. Everyone followed and supported him of their own volition. He truly was worthy of being called a supreme ruler.

But Alvin thought, *What about myself? The three dukes gave up on me, I'm always too late to deal with something when it comes up, and nobody even needs me... Nobody expects anything from me...*

As kings, the difference between them was far too huge. Maybe her plan to falsify her sex and become king was impossible from the start. Thinking that she could save the people of this country might just have been conceit and hubris.

I... I...

As she continued to worry, Alvin finally reached the courtyard of Calvania Castle. It was a beautiful garden full of blooming trees and flowers. And, on the center of the lawn, was the person Alvin currently wanted to see the most. It was Sid, lying down with his legs crossed.

"What is it, Alvin?" he said, his eyes closed. Maybe he had been sleeping until he felt Alvin's presence approaching.

"U-Umm...err...well..." Alvin tried to speak but couldn't find the right words. She was at a loss for a few seconds, but finally, "Umm... Can I sit next to you...Sir Sid?" She ended up saying something different from what she

intended.

“Yeah, sure,” he readily answered.

Alvin sat next to Sid, who was still lying down.

They stayed silent as the sunlight shone and a gentle breeze caressed the trees and the grass. There was a strange but comfortable silence between them as time passed. However, unable to bear it anymore, Alvin started to talk.

“Sir Sid... You don’t have anything to say to me?”

“Alvin, be careful with your words. You’re currently being tested,” he said, his eyes still closed.

Alvin widened her eyes. He didn’t reprimand nor criticize her. He just talked calmly, as if peering into her heart.

“First, let me say this. I won’t help you on my own.”

Alvin gasped.

“Of course, if you weren’t king, I would. I’d fight for you of my own volition and take you to a faraway land. However, you’re king, and I’m your knight. You get it, right?”

“Ah...”

“A knight is the embodiment of their king’s will. A knight is the one using their sword to carve their king’s words in the world. A king must always act on their own decisions and beliefs as they pave their path. That’s what it means to be king. A knight only supports that. So don’t ask me what to do. A king must be determined and decisive. The moment you ask for my opinion, you’ll stop being a king and go back to being a pampered princess. So don’t disappoint me, my current lord.”

Sid’s words gouged Alvin’s heart. She couldn’t refute anything he just said. He mercilessly revealed the naivety she hid in her heart and thrust it in her face. Yes, Alvin had a certain hope—that, even if she didn’t do anything, Sid would just help and resolve everything. However, as just pointed out, that would mean the end of Alvin as king. She had to decide on her own as a king shouldering a country.

Sid had seen through Alvin's hesitation. After all, as Sid's king, if Alvin truly desired it, she would just need to mouth the order.

"Sir Sid... I..."

And yet, she couldn't. Her tongue just wouldn't move. She had to say the words, the royal decree, but she couldn't.

"I... I..." she repeated as Sid silently listened to her, still lying down. "Sir Sid... I...!"

However, just when Alvin was finally about to speak...someone giggled.

"So that's where you were, Prince Alvin." A cheerful voice resounded in the courtyard.

Looking behind her, Alvin found Wolf standing at the courtyard's entrance, his arms folded.

"Wh-Why are you here, Prince Wolf?!"

"I just wanted to see you, Prince Alvin." He shrugged his shoulders, then walked toward her. "Considering how troubled you are, I thought I'd give you a little advice."

"...Advice?"

"Indeed. I heard you didn't enter this man, Sid Blitze, in the Premier Chevalier tournament."

Alvin kept silent as Wolf continued.

"Isn't that strange? After all, the fate of the kingdom rests on that tournament. So the obvious thing to do would be to order him, the kingdom's strongest knight, to participate. And yet, you didn't. Why?"

"I-It's because..." Alvin tried to reply but couldn't.

Seeing her like this, Wolf grinned. "Let me tell you why. It's because you're hesitating, Prince Alvin."

"Wh-What are you saying?!"

"Let's put aside the fact that it's impossible for my white knight to lose. Let's speak about the reason you're hesitating. I understand, you know? Your

hesitation stems from your doubts about your caliber as a king.”

Alvin gasped in shock, and Wolf’s grin deepened.

“You saw the overwhelming difference between us as people standing above others and lost your confidence as a king. For example, let’s say that by some miracle, your Sid beats my white knight and wins the Premier Chevalier tournament. Thanks to that, the empire will leave, and the kingdom will stay independent. Then after that, what will you do?”

“Ah...”

“Your separation with the three ducal houses is definitive, so your country is already in pieces. Moreover, the threat of monsters and the northern demon kingdom will just continue to grow. Because of that, you couldn’t help but wonder if someone like you could really protect your country and your people, right?”

“N-No, you’re wrong...”

“And so, you thought like this: Rather than staying independent because of your ego and pride, maybe being ruled by the empire would be better for the nation and the people? Maybe this is the best thing to do as king?”

The next instant—

“Don’t joke with me!” Alvin shouted.

Alvin, who was usually so meek and docile, was enraged. The reason was...that Wolf was completely right. It was the foremost reason Alvin didn’t order Sid to participate in the Premier Chevalier tournament. After all, the moment she did so, all the responsibilities would be on her. That was why she had the sly hope that Sid would just help her of his own volition.

Having the truth thrust in her face, Alvin was flushed with shame and rage. If it only had been her and Wolf, she could have endured it. However, she couldn’t bear having it happen before Sid. She didn’t want him to see her like that. She didn’t want him to know. Sid was the only one she absolutely didn’t want to have her weakness exposed to.

Naturally, she realized that Sid could see through her and knew everything.

Still, having someone point it out was different. That was why she couldn't contain her feelings.

"Take back your words, Prince Wolf! I won't forgive any more insults toward me!"

However, Wolf didn't care about Alvin's threatening attitude.

"Oh? Is it considered an insult to say the truth in this country? Seeing your reaction, it doesn't seem like I'm wrong, though."

"You still won't stop?!" Alvin impulsively put her hand on her rapier's hilt.

The following instant, the white knight appeared before Wolf, and Sid stood before Alvin to protect her. Sid and the white knight glared at each other, creating the same heavy pressure and tension from earlier.

"It's fine. Step back, white knight," Wolf stopped them. "Don't worry. The Alvin Noll Calvania I took a liking to isn't the kind of shallow person to act rashly on impulse. Same for Sid Blitze. He understands his position. As long as we don't do anything to Alvin, he won't do anything either," he explained to the white knight, who seemed dissatisfied but stepped back nonetheless. "Well then, Prince Alvin, let's get back to the discussion."

Alvin breathed heavily, trembling as she tried to control her anger.

"I'm the king who stands above everything. As such, I'm always right."

"What?!" Alvin exclaimed, daunted to see that Wolf didn't have any intention to apologize.

"And because I'm king, I can't overturn my words so easily. You do understand that, right?"

She gritted her teeth, trembling with rage at the insult.

"Still, I didn't expect that my words would so accurately hit the nail. Hmm, if we leave it at that, you won't feel satisfied, will you? In that case, how about settling it like kings?"

"Like...kings?"

"Yeah. Let's have a match, Prince Alvin." Wolf looked at her like a predator

would its prey, which made her feel a chill down her spine once again. “We’ll duel, one-on-one, you against me.”

“A duel?!”

“In a way, it’ll be like the prelude to the Premier Chevalier tournament. Before seeing who has the best knight, we should see who is the best king. If you win, I’ll take back my words, bow, and apologize. However, if you lose or refuse this duel, then it’ll be proof that I’m higher than you as a king. Thus, I won’t ever take my words back.”

Alvin gasped.

“Of course, we’ll use a death ward. So, Prince Alvin? Do you accept the duel, or not? What is your reply?!”

Wolf laughed. He completely looked down on her, treating her with contempt. And so, Alvin...

“Fine, then I—” she started to say, but...

“Hmph, what a joke.” Sid snorted, then whispered so that only Alvin could hear him, “Don’t listen to him, Alvin. It’s just sophistry from a pretentious brat.”

“S-Sir Sid?”

“Let him say whatever he wants. How is a quarrel between kids going to prove who is the better king? Forget him, and let’s go. A lot happened and you must be tired. Have Isabella make you some tea and eat some biscuits with Tenko.”

Sid’s words were completely sound and right, not leaving any place for an argument. Alvin understood that. She wouldn’t earn anything by accepting the duel. Still, for Alvin... For the current Alvin, who wasn’t her usual calm self...

Everyone says that they’re happy Sir Sid is in the kingdom. Everyone says that they hoped that the previous king Auld was still alive. Nobody cares about or expects anything from me. Even though I tried so hard to become a great king...

She didn’t want to accept Wolf’s words. She couldn’t allow them. No matter what, she had to defeat him and make him apologize. After all, Sid was here. He was her beloved knight, the pillar supporting her heart as she, a woman, walked

the thorny path to become king. She didn't want him to see her being fragile. She wanted to show him that she was worthy of being king. And so...

"Fine, Prince Wolf." Alvin ignored Sid's words. "I, Alvin Noll Calvania, accept this duel," she declared, with her pride at stake, not knowing that she just started her own downfall.

"Alvin...you..." Sid muttered as he scratched his head, looking at her with a pained expression.

"Hmph," Wolf grinned, like a snake having trapped its prey.

"P-Prince Alvin and Prince Wolf are going to duel?!"

"What?! Why?!"

It didn't take long for the rumor to spread around the whole castle. Servants, ministers, the Ladies of the Lake, knights from all factions, and squires from the royal academy all gathered at the castle training area where the duel was going to be held.

"Why is Alvin doing something like that?" Louise asked.

"I... I don't know..." Tenko could only cock her head as she answered, unable to understand.

"Hell yeah! I don't get what's happening, but it's a great opportunity! Destroy him, Alvin! Beat the hell out of that nasty bastard from the empire in front of everyone! Show him who's the boss!"

"Like he said, Prince! Please beat him!"

Christopher and Yuno shouted, and the other squires around them pretty much had the same opinion. All their eyes were directed at the center of the training grounds—the duel area.

"This is how duels should be," Wolf said with composure as he watched the onlookers, which earned him a glare from Alvin.

Isabella, the one appointed to be the referee, stood between them.

“Are you truly sure about this, Prince Alvin?” she asked, worried.

“I am! I can’t stay silent any longer! Otherwise, I wouldn’t be able to live up to the previous king and the Holy King!”

Isabella wondered how she could calm her, but she quickly realized that Alvin was too angry to even listen.

“We’re still not starting? I’m ready whenever, Nimue,” Wolf said.

There was no going back. They both passed the point of no return. If they actually stopped here, Alvin’s reputation would hit rock bottom. Though, maybe that was Wolf’s objective. Considering how fast the rumor spread around the castle, it was possible.

“...Understood. I have confirmed both of your intentions to duel.” Isabella stopped thinking about it, as it was now too late, and she started to speak, following duel etiquette. “The death ward has been activated. The rules are the ones used for duels in the kingdom. The match will continue until either one of you surrenders or can’t move anymore. Well then, get ready...”

Alvin drew her rapier, and Wolf did the same with his sword. They both took a stance, looking sharply at each other.

“Begin!”

“Tayweed!” Alvin shouted “Tailwind” in Espirish to invoke Gale, the green fairy magic, the moment Isabella declared the start of the duel.

A fierce wind wrapped around her, and she ran at incredible speed in a circle around Wolf, who was standing still, composed. Daybreak, Alvin’s green fairy sword, had the power to control the wind. And... *So this is Prince Wolf’s fairy sword...* She glanced at his sword as she ran around him. He didn’t even try to follow Alvin with his eyes. He just kept his stance, holding what seemed to be his fairy sword.

Fairy swords weren’t unique to Calvania. There existed other places similar to the Lake of Swords that gave fairy swords all around the world. Naturally, that was also the case for the Dragnir Empire, and all high-ranking members of the empire’s main force, the Imperial Knight Order, had fairy swords. In fact, the empire’s lands being so vast, they had many such places, so the actual number

of fairy swords in the empire's possession far exceeded the kingdom's. And yet, in pure military strength, they didn't surpass them. They were actually equal. The reason was that Calvania's fairy swords were different from other countries. The swords' quality was far higher. The Kingdom of Calvania had the closest boundary with the fairy world, and thanks to that, stronger fairy swords appeared there. According to Sid, fairy swords were now weaker than in the legendary era, but even when comparing fairy swords of the same rank between the kingdom and the other nations, the kingdom's fairy swords were stronger. That was the reason Calvania managed to be equal to the empire, form an alliance, and stay independent.

I don't know what kind of fairy sword he has... she thought as she used her spiritual senses to carefully observe Wolf. What she found was that he wasn't a Will user—which was an obvious conclusion. She couldn't sense the rhythm in his breath or the signature soul of people using Will. He wasn't in an equal and cooperative relationship with his fairy sword like Alvin and her friends were, using Will as taught by Sid.

In that case, there's nothing to fear! I'll win!

Even if Wolf's fairy sword was of Atzilt-rank, Alvin could use Will to close the gap in strength between their swords. With Alvin's current mastery of Will, she should be able to win. However, there was something that made her a little anxious...

Still, I wonder what color his sword is... She found it eerie. Normally, using her spiritual senses, she should be able to see the color of his sword, as mana took a different color depending on its nature. If she concentrated, she could sense that Tenko's fairy sword was red, and Louise's was blue, for example. And that wasn't something only she could do. Anyone with a fairy sword could.

However, for some reason, she couldn't see the color of Wolf's fairy sword. She could sense his huge mana, but it was colorless. Moreover, looking closely at his sword, it had a strange shape. Generally, being the incarnation of fairies, fairy swords took a beautiful form, exuding vividness and vitality, like works of art. But Wolf's sword had gears, screws, rotors, and such at its base and hilt, making it look mechanical and inorganic.

Alvin wondered if that was how the empire's fairy swords were supposed to be, but... *Oh well, whatever!* She shook off the tinge of anxiety lingering in her heart and steadied herself. *It'll be fine... I have Will that Sir Sid taught me!*

She wasn't going to lose. She couldn't lose. After all, she was different from her past self, who was weak and only relied on her fairy sword. She had trained and become stronger. She didn't intend to lose to anyone who couldn't use Will.

She glanced at the audience, where Sid was silently observing her. *Watch me, Sir Sid! I'll win using everything you've taught me! I'll prove with my sword that I'm worthy of being your lord!* she shouted internally.

"Haaa!" Alvin suddenly yelled and made her move. As she ran in a circle around Wolf, she spun backward and rushed at his back with explosive speed. Her movements were lightning-fast, and she didn't slow down for even an instant.

"So fast!" the students in the audience exclaimed.

Just how many official knights in the kingdom were even able to see her movements and react to them? There was no way Wolf could do it, no matter how strong his fairy sword was.

Alvin's rapier approached Wolf's defenseless back, and everyone in the audience imagined it would be the conclusion of the duel...but a loud metallic sound rang out, and sparks scattered.

"What?!" Alvin and the audience widened their eyes. Even though Alvin's attack was so fast and well-timed that it should have been unavoidable, Wolf blocked it just by casually putting his sword behind him.

"Oh? You're quite good, Prince Alvin. To think you could get so fast using such an *old-fashioned* sword... I'm truly surprised." He grinned, then started to move.

He turned back and pounced at Alvin, with spring-like explosiveness, slashing at her. His swing was so strong it felt like it could tear the atmosphere. Alvin immediately put her rapier in front of her to defend herself and, with a loud metallic sound, she was sent ten meters away, leaving two tracks on the ground

as she shaved it with her feet.

“What?! S-Such power! Arg!” Alvin coughed blood. Her hands, holding her sword, were so numb she couldn’t feel them anymore. Even though she had blocked the attack, the impact was so strong it actually reached her bones and internal organs.

That attack just now... It was far stronger than my best attack using Will!

Moreover, no matter how one looked at it, Wolf hadn’t been serious. It was just a casual swing, and yet...

“That’s impossible...” Alvin muttered, shocked.

The audience was silent, at a loss for words from seeing the difference in power between Alvin and Wolf.

“Hmph, what’s the problem? The duel just started. Let’s use all the techniques and skills we know and talk through our swords, Prince.” Wolf laughed triumphantly. “Still, you’re pretty interesting. You’re using a strange technique that allows you to manifest strength above what your low-rank sword should be capable of. You must have gone through really harsh training. I’m deeply moved.” He chuckled.

“I can’t believe it... Just what is your sword?” Alvin asked fearfully.

For an instant, she suspected the possibility of Wolf being able to use Will but immediately denied it. She didn’t feel him using Will during his attack, which meant its power came from the sword. It wasn’t a normal fairy sword.

“Prince Alvin. Though it’s true our attack had been sudden and unexpected, why do you think the empire could so easily make the impregnable Langrissa Fort fall? The answer...is this,” he said, showing off his mechanical, inorganic sword. “This is a new kind of fairy sword the empire is proudly using to cut through this new era—an artificial fairy sword, a spirit gear.”

“Artificial fairy sword...? Spirit gear...?” Alvin was dumbfounded.

“When I decided to unify this world, I already knew that the quality and quantity of fairy swords were important. This is an unavoidable problem, as a country’s strength is equal to its fairy swords’ strength. And, while we win in

number, we lose to the kingdom in terms of quality. That's when I thought: if we don't have them, let's just create them artificially."

"What?!"

"I welcomed a certain mage under me and had them create a way to artificially forge high-quality fairy swords. The process is simple: lots of fairies are hunted, and using a certain ritual, they're transformed into swords. Unfortunately, this method makes them pretty weak. However, by melting a few and using a special ritual to fuse them, it's possible to create strong swords. And the result is as you see," he said, then struck the ground with his sword.

The ground exploded with a flash, creating shock waves in all directions, only leaving behind a huge crater. Its mana output was far above a normal fairy sword.

"This is a spirit gear, a colorless fairy sword. The new generation's knight sword."

Anyone with spiritual senses could see the overwhelming—yet insipid and transparent—mana coming from Wolf's fairy sword. It didn't have the beautiful radiance of the three core colors found in nature: red, green, and blue. All that could be seen was colorless destructive energy coming from a pitiful sword forced to be a tool for murder. Certainly, it felt strong...but it was also blasphemy and felt disgusting.

"H-How could you do something like that?!" Isabella shouted, enraged. "You forcefully transformed fairies into swords and fused them?! The forbidden magic used to do it should have been strictly prohibited by us, the Ladies of the Lake!"

"I don't care. It's forbidden magic, and? I can only think of you as fools for hiding such a wonderful technique."

"Even putting that aside, aren't fairies people's friends since ancient times?! They wished to be useful and offered their bodies to become swords... Fairy swords are proof of the bond between people and fairies! And yet you just hunted them, transformed them into swords, destroyed them, then fused them to create a single sword... Doesn't it pain your heart to do such cruel things?!" Isabella asked, tears forming in the corners of her eyes.

“How foolish. Fairy swords are just tools. My great cause is far more important. I don’t care how many thousands, or tens of thousands of fairies I need to crush to accomplish it.”

Isabella, trembling with rage, was stumped by Wolf’s words.

“Anyway, Prince Alvin. I mass-produced spirit gears and gave them to all my soldiers, creating the strongest knight order. Ah, but mine is made from a hundred fairies. It’s special, and there aren’t any others like it. Anyway, using this new power, I’ll unify the world under the empire. Then I’ll crush the northern demon kingdom and create true peace that will inspire development and isn’t just lip service. To that end, I’m ready to make countless sacrifices! This is my supremacy! Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!”

Everyone was scared and awed by the self-confidence Wolf exuded as an absolute ruler. Wolf was overwhelming the place with his presence.

“Ah...”

And, of course, Alvin wasn’t an exception. She stiffened, faced with Wolf’s overwhelming presence.

“Prince Alvin, your numbness should be gone now, right?”

Alvin gritted her teeth.

“Then let’s continue our duel and see which of us is the superior king,” Wolf said with a ferocious smile. He was looking at Alvin just like a lion would a fawn, licking his lips.

Once again, Alvin felt a mysterious physiological disgust and fear.

“A-Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!” she screamed to shake the feeling off and slashed at Wolf, burning all her Will.

However, Wolf easily blocked it and launched a counterattack.

Thus, a one-sided duel began.

—

Alvin fiercely swung her rapier, launching terrifying continuous strikes, her body clad in a violent wind. She stopped her swift charge, made a feint, stepped

sharply to the side, then kicked Wolf's legs. She then repositioned herself and thrust her rapier as fast as lightning. Then she pulled her sword back, turned to the side, and swung diagonally before rotating her whole body and using the momentum to give three strong strikes.

She had trained her swordsmanship and Will. Even Third Squires and official fairy knights wouldn't be able to block three of the attacks she just did. And yet, even when faced with Alvin's dexterous swordsmanship...

"Ha ha ha ha ha! You're good! You're really good, Prince Alvin!" Wolf blocked, warding, and knocked back each attack just by moving his sword a little. It was as if he was just letting Alvin practice her swings.

Even though Alvin attacked him from all directions while moving as fast as the wind, Wolf blocked everything without even taking a single step. Alvin felt like she was fighting against Sid.

"Then what about this?!" Alvin distanced herself and chanted, "Frayhaibit!" It was Espirish for "Fly swiftly and strike firm," used to invoke the green fairy magic, War Hammer of Wind. Highly compressed wind flew from the tip of her rapier toward Wolf. Its strength was that of a battering ram that could destroy a castle gate, but...

"Hmph!" Wolf readied his sword and raised his fighting spirit a little.

An overwhelming amount of colorless mana erupted from his sword and created a barrier before him that easily blocked Alvin's strongest attack.

"Hmm, you really are skillful."

Alvin gritted her teeth. What Wolf did wasn't magic. He just treated his fairy sword like a slave and forced it to let out a large quantity of mana to create a barrier able to intercept Alvin's magic. Before learning Will, Alvin also had been relying on her fairy sword, using its mana. However, there was trust and cooperation between her and her sword. If the sword became exhausted, it would stop lending its mana.

But Wolf's sword was different. He treated his sword like a slave, taking as much mana as he wanted, forcefully exploiting it. And it was quite probable that even if the sword reached its limit, he would...

“If you use your sword like that, it’ll break!” Alvin yelled.

“Oh? And? Swords are consumable goods. If one breaks, you just need to use another.” Wolf didn’t consider fairies as friends living together with people. Alvin felt like they would never understand each other, and she didn’t want to.

I don’t want to lose against someone like him! she thought as she gritted her teeth in frustration. She didn’t lose against him in terms of swordsmanship and magic, quite the contrary. When it came to pure skills, she was far above him. However, Wolf’s spirit gear was just so strong that it even surpassed her advantage.

“Well then, I guess it’s my turn now.”

Alvin gasped.

“Let me show you how swords are supposed to be used.” Wolf made his move.

He casually closed the distance, and then he casually raised his sword and just as casually swung it down. Looking at it in terms of swordsmanship, it was just an ordinary swing. While it did show signs of some training and studying, the blow was so ordinary that it was obvious he never went through blood-spitting training that made one faint from pushing themselves too hard. And yet, it was terrifyingly fast and frighteningly strong.

“Aaaaaaah?!” Alvin screamed as she blocked the blow and her legs staggered, making her bend backward.

The impact was so great that it went through her rapier, and she felt the bones in her body creak. Even though she hadn’t been attacked directly, she still received huge damage, and her face warped in pain.

“Ha ha ha! Take that! And that! And another!” Wolf attacked incessantly, like a young boy playing with a tree branch.

Alvin did her best to stop or ward off each attack. But each time, the impact reached her body, hurting and tormenting her. The way her body bent each time she received a shock made her look like a doll doing a foolish dance.

“Arg?! Aaaah?!” she groaned in pain.

“Ha ha ha ha ha! What’s the problem, Prince?! Do your best! Show me what you’re made of! The duel just started! Ha ha ha ha ha!” Wolf laughed sadistically as he tormented Alvin again and again.

It wasn’t a duel anymore. It was just plain abuse. Anyone looking at them already knew who the winner was. Still, to show everyone that he was above Alvin, Wolf relentlessly continued to hurt her while delaying the conclusion of the match.

What should have been a sacred duel degraded to a vulgar show.

“A-Alvin!” Tenko shouted, flushed with anger and ready to jump in with her hand on her katana’s hilt.

“Restrain yourself, Tenko!” Elaine quickly restrained her.

“L-Let me go! I have to save Alvin!”

“I understand how you feel, but if you do that, everything will be over! This is still an official duel between kings! If squires like us, who aren’t even knighted, interfere, it will become a huge diplomatic issue! Can you take that responsibility?!”

Tenko gritted her teeth in frustration and cried as she continued to watch the battle through her tears.

And, as everyone was at their wits’ end, their faces deathly pale, only Sid observed Alvin’s fight calmly. His expression was so indifferent that it was as if he didn’t feel anything from seeing Alvin being tormented.

However, if one were to look at his clenched fist, they would be able to see blood dripping from it.

“Gaaaah!” Alvin screamed as she was sent flying away by Wolf, then struck the ground.

Her body was in tatters, exhausted and covered in sweat, and her breath was so rough she wasn’t able to knead her Will anymore. On the other hand, Wolf was in perfect health, as composed as ever.

“Haaa...haaa...haaa...” Alvin panted as she used her rapier to help herself stand.

“You should understand it by now, no? The difference between us as kings,” Wolf said, looking down on Alvin. “You’re not even suited to be king. Just admit it already, and kneel before me. Give me your country.”

“Why...?” Alvin squeezed out. She knew there was no way for her to win anymore, but there was something that she just couldn’t understand. “Why are you so fixated on making me serve you?”

Wolf didn’t reply.

“If you only wanted the kingdom, you wouldn’t need to do something so roundabout... You could just have done the same as with other countries and invaded us normally... So, why...?”

Hearing this, Wolf giggled and smirked.

“D-Did I say something funny?”

“You’re so dense,” Wolf said as he laughed, dumbfounding Alvin even more. “You still didn’t notice even after everything I’ve said?”

“Huh...?”

“I don’t care about the kingdom. True, I’d need to get it for my ambition to unify the world, but right now, I don’t care about it. My true objective is you, Alvin. I want you.” He looked straight at Alvin like a predator, making her feel a chill down her spine once again.

“Huh? You want me...? Y-You mean, as a retainer or a valet...?”

“Stop feigning ignorance. I want you as my *empress*.”

“Wh-What idiocy are you saying?! I-I’m a man!” she objected, her voice trembling.

“You’re a woman, no? Prince Alvin...or rather, Princess Alma,” Wolf declared, sure of himself. No, *he knew from the start*. That’s just how full of confidence his expression was.

And, hearing him, everyone stiffened, astonished.

“Huh? The prince is...a woman?”

“Wh-What is he saying...?”

“Did we mishear?”

Confusion and shock spread around the training grounds. Nobody actually believed him, but...

“I-It’s true that Prince Alvin is as beautiful as a woman...”

“N-No, wait! Even if you’re right, that can’t be the case!”

The fact that Alvin had such a beautiful, androgynous, and feminine face made Wolf’s words more believable. And, as everyone started to doubt...

“You’re wrong! I’m a man!” Alvin shouted. “I’m Alvin Noll Calvania! I’m a squire training to be knighted. I’ll become the king that will support this country! I’m no one else!”

“Stop. That’s enough, Alma.” Wolf shook his head as if pitying Alvin. “While being a woman, you swore to become king for your country, killing your femininity, and you didn’t look back. You did your best and are truly praiseworthy. I commend you.”

“I-I’m saying that I’m a—”

“You don’t need to force yourself anymore. After all, a woman can’t become king.”

Alvin grimaced.

“And yet, the way you live is beautiful. You chose to go against adversity and fight for your people. You’re a woman more precious than any treasure. You’re the best woman, worthy to become my empress as I stand at the top of the world. In consideration of all your achievements until now, I’ll reward you. Become mine, Princess Alma. I’ll free you from the heavy responsibility of being king.”

“Shu...”

“Politics and fighting aren’t suited for a cute and lovely woman like you. Let yourself be pampered like the princess you are. Rather than standing on top of people, you should be below me, voicing sweet notes at my behest. That’s a woman’s happiness, and I’ll give that to you.”

“Shut uuuuup!” Alvin yelled with rage, not being able to bear it anymore. “If you continue to insult me like that... I...!” She pointed her rapier at Wolf, even forgetting to deny that she was a woman.

It was the first time someone insulted her so much. Her resolve to throw away her happiness as a woman, the hardships she endured, and her conviction to continue forward even though she had wanted to run away many times—all of this was part of Alvin. And yet, Wolf had trampled on everything, sneering at her from above, saying it was worthless. He had deemed everything she went through as mere makeup, used to make her more beautiful as a woman.

She couldn’t forgive that. There was no way she could. And so...

“Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!” She ran. She ran straight at Wolf, raising her rapier overhead. She had to at least strike him once. She had to hit him with a strike containing all her determination and pride, or she wouldn’t be satisfied.

Unfortunately, there was no way a sword filled with idle thoughts would reach anyone.

“Hmph.” Wolf evaded Alvin’s desperate charge while swinging his sword twice.

The next instant...Alvin’s chest was cut.

“Ah...” Alvin muttered, dumbfounded.

Just like fresh fruits being peeled, the bust of her uniform was torn open...exposing her chest to the sun. What it revealed was taut and lustrous white skin and modest, beautifully round bulges that were impossible for men to have.

Alvin immediately threw away her sword and crouched, hiding her breasts with her arms.



All the people who had been watching her duel against Wolf had, whether they wanted to or not, ended up seeing it. They now knew the truth.

“H-Hey...Did you see that...?”

“Th-That can’t be...”

“I-Impossible...”

Confusion and shock spread among the audience. It was the same for the Blitze class students, who learned for the first time that Alvin was, in fact, a woman. They could only look at her dumbfounded, their mouths wide open.

“Ah...Aaaaaaah?!” Alvin screamed, flustered as her mind was in chaos. She could only crouch and hide her chest as she trembled.

There was no turning back now, and that fact filled her mind with regret and fear as tears spilled from her eyes. Right now, she truly looked like a frail girl.

Wolf looked down at her and laughed. “Ha ha ha ha! What’s the problem, Prince Alvin?! A king shouldn’t throw away his sword in front of the enemy! A man would never do something so foolish! Do you get it, now?! You’re a woman! So you should be ladylike and—” Wolf stopped talking. His heart thumped, trembling from sensing incoming death. He started to sweat buckets, and his body temperature plummeted. “What?!” Then he noticed...that Sid had suddenly appeared next to Alvin.

Sid turned his back to Wolf. Then he took off his mantle and covered Alvin’s exposed body from the eyes of the audience. He was silent. He just faced Alvin without even glancing at Wolf.

Wolf felt nothing from him—neither bloodlust nor enmity, not even anger. And yet, his instincts were screaming at him that, if Sid felt like it, he would be dead already.

“Prince Wolf.”

“Huh?!” Having his name called, he finally noticed that the white knight had appeared before him, protecting him from Sid. He had been so pressured by the strong feeling of death that he hadn’t even been aware of the white knight’s presence. As Wolf regulated his breathing, enduring the nightmare he went

through, new people arrived.

“A-Alvin! Alvin!”

“Prince! Come back to your senses!”

Tenko and Yuno rushed toward Alvin, who was still stupefied. Isabella gathered the nearby Nimues and was hurling orders with an angry expression. The mood wasn't suited for dueling anymore.

“Truly, how unsightly,” the white knight suddenly muttered, looking at Alvin. It was impossible to discern if their voice was male or female, so they might have been using magic. And yet, even then it was possible to sense scorn and joy in their voice as they glanced at Alvin, who was still stupefied and crying.

Wolf felt a chill run down his spine as he sensed the faint darkness oozing from the white knight.

“What do we do now?” the white knight asked.

“H-Hmph. What a turn-off,” Wolf said as he sheathed his sword, signaling the end of the event. “Oh well, we'll just go as we first planned. Moreover, this should drive a wedge in the kingdom. With this, the people will abandon Alvin. The kingdom will slowly fall into my hands, and Alvin...no, Princess Alma, will be mine. Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!” He laughed unnaturally loudly, then turned back and walked away.

He intended for it to be a show of composure as he triumphantly left the training grounds, but he didn't notice that he had started to quicken his pace as if fleeing...because he feared Sid, who was still silently turning his back.

As Wolf left, the white knight, who was standing in the way to protect him, muttered, “You choose the wrong lord to serve, Sid Blitze.”

Did he hear the white knight? Or maybe he didn't? Either way, Sid stayed silent, not saying a single word.

Chapter 4: New Resolution

“Dear me, you truly are amazing, Prince Wolf,” Duke Ortol said.

She, as well as Duke Durande, Duke Anthalo, and Wolf, were all surrounding an oak table and drinking wine. They were in a luxurious room of Duke Anthalo’s villa, situated in the capital’s high-noble residential area.

“Indeed. Your stratagem and the way you performed it were truly brilliant. The Kingdom of Calvania is practically yours.”

The three dukes just kept praising Wolf, who was drinking his wine while haughtily sitting on the sofa, his legs crossed.

“Hmph.” He snorted, not answering them, as he finished his glass and poured himself a new one.

“Finally! We finally managed to make the unpleasant royal family fall! From now on, we will be able to relish in the delight of war under your command, Prince Wolf! Ga ha ha ha! I cannot wait for it!” Duke Durande rejoiced, as, more than to increase the country’s territory, he simply wanted to invade other nations for the thrills of war.

“We are entering a turbulent era. With a weak king like Alvin, this country and its people would not survive. Only a truly strong king like you, Prince Wolf, is worthy to rule over everything. I will devote my body and soul to your supremacy.” Duke Ortol didn’t care about other people as long as she was fine. As long as she could live extravagantly, she couldn’t care less about what would become of the kingdom. That’s why she was glad she had abandoned the sinking ship and got on the winning side.

“Still, I am deeply impressed by your foresight, Your Highness. It is truly an honor that I, LeMay de Anthalo, became a part of your supremacy.” Actually, he had been the first one to make contact with Wolf. He was the typical example of joining the enemy when one couldn’t beat them. He was a narcissist who thought he had great skills because he had managed to get a good chunk of

territory inside the empire.

The three of them had easily betrayed Alvin. They swore allegiance to Wolf the instant he promised them that they would get to rule over the kingdom's lands after they were absorbed by the empire.

"Also, I have to say that the empire's spirit gears are incredible!" Duke Durande said as he glanced at the mechanical sword hanging at his hip—a spirit gear.

"Indeed, I did not imagine such swords existed in this world."

"They make Atzilt-rank fairy swords look like scraps. They truly are the swords of the new era. Now that we have tasted their power, we cannot go back to the traditional and outdated fairy swords."

Duke Ortol and Duke Anthalo agreed as they lovingly caressed their own spirit gears. They all had received one as proof of their allegiance to Wolf. They became entranced with their overwhelming power and didn't care about their fairy swords anymore, the partners with whom they had shared their fate until now. They had wholly sold their souls to the empire.

Duke Durande nodded. "With them, we do not have to fear that Barbarian anymore!"

"Sadly, Sir Sid has been spreading that old technique—Will, they call it—among the squires and is earning their respect... However, now we will be able to make them come to their senses," Duke Anthalo said.

Duke Ortol agreed. "We can get such powerful swords just by obeying the empire. It is clear as day that Will won't be needed in the upcoming era."

"Indeed. We should start by selecting knights we can trust and distribute the spirit gears slowly. Then..."

The three dukes continued to discuss merrily, full of excitement.

Hmph. You're just a bunch of scum who sold their own country. Wolf scorned them, astonished by how shameless they were.

The truth was that he actually didn't trust them. If they could betray once, then they would be able to do it again. However, as strong as the Imperial

Knight Order was, he couldn't make light of the three ducal houses' fairy knight orders. If he fought against them, the empire would suffer quite a few losses, which would be a problem, considering how the northern demon kingdom kept amassing strength. He wanted to avoid that, and that's why he brought them to his side. As long as he was careful with the number of spirit gears he gave, he could easily deal with such fools.

In that sense, they were equal in taking advantage of each other. And how could he call himself a supreme ruler if he wasn't able to tame a few treacherous allies? Also...

If I can make Alvin...no, Princess Alma, mine, I don't mind having to bring such scum to my side. Wolf boldly grinned before gulping down his wine.

The three dukes were utterly ignorant about Wolf's thoughts as they continued to drink wine and talk.

"Still, to think that Prince Alvin was a woman! That damn King Auld deceived us! That ingrate, foolish king!"

"Indeed! But that explains why, ever since the previous generation, the Ladies of the Lake have been slowly trying to change the legislation to make having a female king...a queen...possible."

"However, the law forbidding women to become king is still here and implanted inside the people's minds. So now, Prince Alvin cannot become king anymore."

"If the prince truly had been a man, the royal faction could have tried to reverse the situation, but now, this is impossible! We won! This is Prince Wolf's victory!"

"A toast to Prince Wolf's supremacy!"

"We swear eternal allegiance to His Highness Wolf!"

They clinked their glasses together, wearing ugly smiles as they didn't doubt their victory and glory even a little.

Feeling sick of their nauseating vulgarity, Wolf stood up and left.

“Alma... I’m really impressed your delicate body managed to endure protecting your country from this scum,” Wolf muttered as he walked through the villa’s corridor. “I was right to come. A frail woman like you can’t be a king, a pillar supporting everything. You don’t need to walk such an unhappy path. You have to be happier than anyone. I’ll save you and make you happy. I’ll give you anything you want,” he declared.

As he walked, a certain scene from his childhood came to his mind.

“I’m sure you don’t remember it, but I...”

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Alvin’s and Wolf’s fathers—the previous king Auld and the current emperor Richard Noll Dragnir—were old friends who often visited each other’s country, which deepened their diplomatic relations.

Around ten years ago, Richard visited the Kingdom of Calvania, accompanied by Wolf. Back then, Wolf was already quite the naughty child, and, bored by his father and King Auld’s talk, he secretly sneaked away to explore the large Calvania Castle.

As he wandered around, he lost his way and somehow reached a different dimension inside the castle. And there...he met Alvin—Alma.

It was a complete coincidence.

Back then, it had already been decided she had to live as a boy—as Alvin—and was forced to act like one. But thinking it was too cruel for a young child, Auld allowed her to go back to being a girl—to being Alma—on certain days and only in one of the secret dimensions in the castle.

Children had a certain affinity with fairies, allowing them to sense their presence easily. In the same way, it was easy for children to lose their way and accidentally slip into the fairy world, which the different dimension was part of.

Hence, for Wolf and Alma to meet that day, at that time, in such a place, it was truly a coincidence. It could even be called a miracle, or fate. After all, a meeting that shouldn’t have been possible actually happened.

“Aha ha ha! Hey, who are you?! Where did you come from?!”





The different dimension was bathed in sunlight, and a young girl stood next to a quiet spring. She wore a lovely white dress, had beautiful shining blonde hair, big round eyes that were like sapphire, and displayed a carefree smile. She was so pure and innocent, so immaculate and untainted, that it was as if she didn't know that malice existed in the world. She felt so divine. He even hesitated to go near her.

Alma's innocence pierced Wolf's soul as a shock ran through his body. In that instant, his everything became hers.

Back then, Alma was still too young to understand how grave it'd be for the world to know she was a girl. However, Wolf was different. He was already smart enough to realize that he absolutely had to hide the fact that he had met Alma in this secret place. As such, he lied and introduced himself with a false name.

Naturally, the innocent Alma didn't doubt anything he said. She smiled and took his hand. "Tenko isn't here today, so let's play together!"

After that, they played together for the whole day on the shore of the spring. They ran around the plain, splashed water at each other, held hands, laughed as they rolled on the grass, and such.

Fun time quickly flew, and Wolf, who absolutely had to hide the fact he had met Alma, reluctantly said goodbye to her.

"Someday... Let's play together again."

Until the last moment, Alma's smile kept grasping Wolf's heart.

After that, a lot happened, and Wolf wasn't able to come to the kingdom again, making it their last meeting. That is, until recently...

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"Alma. I came here to save you," Wolf muttered as he watched over the capital's streets from the villa's terrace, and the night's wind shook his hair. "You're a woman. You don't have to become king. You should just smile innocently next to me. Don't think, and just obey me. I did a lot of cruel things to you, but that was for your own good that—"

“Prince Wolf.” Suddenly, a woman appeared from the darkness, interrupting Wolf.

She was a bewitching woman wearing a white robe with a hood hiding her face. From her voice, Wolf could guess she was around the same age as him, but she exuded a strange presence.

“Oh, it’s you.” He faced her without being alerted by her sudden appearance.

That was natural. After all, she was one of his most trusted retainers and the one with the most distinguished services. She was the one who had created the spirit gears, mass-produced them, and spread them to the empire’s army. She was also the one who had introduced the white knight and their incredible strength to him. She was also the one who had poisoned the cowardly, moderate emperor and made it look like an illness. And it was also her who had made the first negotiations with the three dukes. She helped Wolf’s supremacy in a lot of other ways too and had become an indispensable person in Wolf’s camp.

“How’s the situation in the west?” he asked.

“Everything is going well. No matter how the kingdom moves, the multitude of plans I have laid should arrest its army. The preparations are perfect. Your victory is now certain, Your Highness.”

“I see. Then...”

“Yes, all that is left is to grant your dearest wish: making Prince Alvin...no, Princess Alma...yours. By making the descendant of the Holy King your empress, the Kingdom of Calvania, the second strongest country in the continent, will be yours. Using this opportunity, you will take the throne of the empire, and from then on, the minstrels will start to sing the epic story of how you became the greatest supreme king in history—to the point that the old poems about the legendary era will completely disappear.”

“I see. You’re right... Ha...ha ha ha... Aha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!” Wolf’s loud laughter echoed in the stillness of the night.

Wolf didn’t doubt his victory for an instant, and the white woman looked at him from the gap of her hood and smiled. It was a fascinating, bewitching,

eerie, and chilly smile made of two vermilion lines that shone in the dark.

People will always talk.

It didn't take long for the rumor of Prince Alvin being a woman to go around the castle and the capital. It was now the hottest topic in the kingdom.

"So that's how it was..."

Inside the Blitze classroom, Tenko just revealed the truth about Alvin to her classmates, who could only nod quietly.

"To think that Alvin was bearing such a burden..." Christopher groaned and clenched his fist.

"I can guess what is going through Alvin's mind right now... No, that would be presumptuous of me." Elaine sighed.

"Sniff... Prince Alvin's always optimistic and resolute, never showing any sign of pain... All for our sake..." Lynette cried.

"Alvin always said that it was the destiny of being born into the royal family. He threw away his happiness as a woman to become king for this country... He had such resolve and really did his best...and yet...and yet...!" Tenko clenched her teeth, her face flushed with rage and her hand on her katana's hilt. Her eyes were tightly shut, and tears spilled from their corners. "I'll never forgive that man! I'll kill him!"

Everyone looked silently at Tenko, who was speaking with indignation, until...

"Well, I get the gist of things now," Theodore said. Then he continued, somewhat coldly, "Let's do some real talk. What are you all going to do?"

"Wh-What do you mean?" Christopher asked, blinking in surprise.

"We didn't come to a conclusion last time, and now the situation has changed even more... So, yeah, it's time to make a decision."

"There's no need to ask! I'll always be on Alvin's side!"

"Indeed! The prince saved my life! Being a woman or a man doesn't matter!"

Tenko and Yuno immediately answered, angry.

“You really don’t get it, you idiots.” Theodore sighed. “Look, I know you want to support Alvin, but a woman can’t become king in this country. That’s the law.”

Tenko and Yuno grimaced.

“Remember why it was possible to create the Blitze class even though it would break the traditions of the Calvania Royal Fairy Knight Academy? Because Alvin was, though not completely, the heir to the throne. However...that’s not the case anymore.”

“Ah...” They started to realize what he meant.

“In other words, the Blitze class is a sinking ship. And it’s not just the class. We don’t even know what is going to become of the kingdom. If we follow Alvin, we’ll never become knights. That’s why I’m asking you to think about your future.”

“Th-That’s...”

“Thankfully, we’ve been trained by Sir Sid, and the whole school knows our strength. If we try, we might be able to join one of the dukes’ factions,” Theodore said with a derisive smile.

“You...?!” Christopher grabbed his collar and glared at him. “You’re telling us to betray Alvin?!”

“I’m not talking about betrayal or anything! I’m trying to make you face reality!” Theodore glared back, undaunted. “Of course, I feel bad for Alvin! But it’s something we can’t avoid! We can’t run away! We have to face it and think thoroughly! You can’t just act on an impulse! You’ll regret it! Do you get that?!”

Everyone gasped.

“Tenko, Yuno. Even after all I’ve said, you’re still going to be on Alvin’s side, right?” Theodore glanced at them.

“Of course! No matter what happens, I’m Alvin’s knight! I’ll follow Alvin everywhere, even to the depths of hell!”

“Same for me! My life is the prince’s!”

“There you go.” Theodore shrugged his shoulders, then shifted his attention back to Christopher. “If you’re as resolved as they are, then that’s fine. But are you? Can you say that you have the same determination as them? You won’t regret it? You want to become knights, right? You have a reason you want to become one, right?”

Christopher groaned and fell silent. All the other students kept quiet too.

“I-I...” Christopher wanted to become a knight. It was his dream since childhood, and not becoming one would be the same as dying.

“I...” Elaine had to become a knight. Having been disinherited because of her incompetence, she had to become one to make a new house name.

“Sniff... I... I...” Lynette, too, had to become a knight. She needed the money to support her family, which fell to ruin.

Naturally, that was the same for the First Squires. They all went through hardships to enroll in the Calvania Royal Fairy Knight Academy because they wanted or needed to become knights.

They couldn’t just gloss over the issue. The time had come for them to think realistically about their futures.

Heavy silence reigned over the classroom. Time slowly passed as nobody said anything until, finally, someone broke the silence.

“So... What are *you* going to do, Theodore?” Christopher asked in a subdued voice, still hanging his head. “You’re the smartest among us... So, what are you going to do?”

“Me?” Theodore pushed up his glasses, acting as if there wasn’t even a need to ask. “The answer is obvious. I came to this school to rise in the world, so...”

“Lady Isabella! What is the meaning of this?!”

The conference room of the royal faction was currently in chaos, as the ministers in charge of national politics and the knights in charge of the national defense kept throwing questions at Isabella.

“We never heard that Prince Alvin was a woman!”

“You deceived us!”

“No, that was not my intention,” she explained. “It was the decision of the previous king Auld, who was concerned with the future of the country. He had to do it to stabilize the government, as there was no heir to the throne back then. Nonetheless, it is true that I supported it. For this, you have my deepest apologies.”

“We don’t care about your excuses! How are you going to take responsibility?!”

“A woman can’t become king!”

“Do you understand how grave the situation is?! The country is going to be captured by those insolent dukes and that hateful empire!”

“It’s not the time for that, Sir Aizess! We should quickly impose a gag order to conceal the truth about the prince’s gender!”

“It’s too late! Everyone in the capital already knows!”

“More importantly, give us more explanations about the prince!”

“No, even more importantly than that, we should discuss what we are going to do from now on!”

“No, before that, we should talk about who is to blame for putting us in such a situation!”

“Did you not listen until now?! Lady Isabella said it was the previous king’s decision! We should respect it!”

“I keep saying that, more importantly, we should—”

They just kept repeating themselves and going in circles without progressing the conversation. Nobody was in the state of mind to give a constructive opinion.

“Maybe we should just accept Prince Wolf’s demand and have Prince Alvin—or rather, Princess Alma, was it?—marry into the imperial family? That way—”

“Whaaat?! Such words are unforgivable!”

“And you call yourself a retainer of the kingdom—of the Holy King?!”

At last, the ministers started to quarrel among themselves. Isabella observed the chaos as if it happened in a different world.

The Kingdom of Calvania is in a predicament. The royal court is like entangled threads. There is no sense of unity, and the government can't agree on a decision anymore...

The just cause of Alvin being the rightful heir of the great King Auld had disappeared. Between those who kept their allegiance to the royal family, those who refused to stay loyal to Alvin, who was a woman, and those who still didn't know what to do—as well as the betrayal of the three ducal houses—the royal court was in chaos.

The Kingdom of Calvania was now a sinking ship. Surely, even among the ones gathered here, some were already planning to make contact with the three dukes secretly.

However, in such a situation, Isabella's first thought was... *Alvin... You poor thing...* She pitied the girl who was toyed with by fate and people's convenience.

Alvin wasn't at fault. She only had done her best with the duty that was unfairly given to her. She gave her everything for the country, sacrificing many things. She tried her best to become a great king. And yet...*this* was the result.

What Alvin had spent most of her life working toward had been cruelly denied in an instant and was thoroughly destroyed. It was a truly merciless conclusion. Isabella hated Wolf and the three dukes so much that even killing them a hundred times wouldn't be enough to satisfy her.

I have no right to say anything to Alvin... Even if it had been the only way, it didn't change the fact that Isabella was one of the reasons everything happened. *If there were someone that could speak to her, that would be...* A certain man came to her mind.

The knight renowned for being the strongest in the legendary era.

Also infamously called the fiendish Barbarian.

Or the patriotic hero, the Lightning Knight.

He was a man of many mysteries. However, if there was a thing that was certain, it was that he was a knight among knights. The only person that could speak to Alvin right now was him—Sid Blitze.

I always watched over her since she was a child. We may not be tied by blood, but she is like a daughter to me. So, please, Sir Sid... Please, save her... I don't mind how you do it... So please...save her! Isabella prayed, heartfelt, regretting her powerlessness.

“As I thought, that’s where you were, Alvin.”

They were on the shore of a beautiful spring in the middle of a green forest—a secret dimension, accessible through the mirror in Alvin’s room. The place was filled with warm sunlight and pleasant wind. The birds’ singing tickled their ears, and the fairies made their presence known. And in the center of such fantastical and beautiful scenery was Alvin, sitting, her arms holding her knees as she gazed at the spring.

“I searched for you. Took me quite a while, you know?” Sid scratched his head as he approached Alvin.

“I’m...too ashamed to meet everyone...” she muttered.

Sid widened his eyes and stopped walking. Alvin’s appearance was drastically different from usual. Generally, she would use a magic comb to shorten her hair and wear her squire uniform in a way that made her look like a gallant man.

Right now, she was wearing a white dress, and her blonde hair was long enough to touch the ground. Moreover, the fairy sword that always hung at her waist was nowhere to be found. She wasn’t hiding anything anymore and stopped trying to keep up appearances. In front of Sid was Alvin as a woman—as Princess Alma.

“Aha ha, it surprised you, right?” Alma chuckled bashfully and stood up. “Does this dress suit me?”

Sid stayed silent, listening to Alma’s *feminine voice*.

“It might be a little conceited, but I think it suits me pretty well. I think I can

look quite good if I properly dress myself as a girl, like I am now,” she said playfully as she pinched the skirt of her dress and gracefully spun around.

Her skirt gently flared, and her shining blonde hair smoothly swayed. Her beauty was dream-like... Just like a princess in a fairy tale.

“So, how do I look? Do you think it suits me, Sir Sid? Am I cute?”

Sid smiled gently. “Yeah, you look great. Honestly, there wasn’t a princess as lovely as you even in the legendary era.”

“Really?! Thank god! I’m so glad...” Alma smiled delightfully, full of happiness.

Then they stayed silent for a while until, finally, Alma turned toward Sid.

“Sir Sid, I made my decision.”

Sid didn’t reply.

“I’ll...marry Prince Wolf. I’ll entrust this country to him.”

Sid listened to her silently.

“Everything is over. The spell is broken. I can’t become king anymore... No, in the first place, it’s not about being a man or a woman... I just don’t have the qualities to be king.”

Sid stayed quiet.

“Still, as a member of the royal family, I have a duty to protect this nation’s people. As a woman, I can’t do much, so I thought hard about it. And, in the end...I realized that marrying into Dragnir’s imperial family was the best I could do.”

Sid didn’t say anything.

“That way, the kingdom and the empire will become one. Prince Wolf treats vassal countries harshly, but if it’s his wife’s homeland, he might be a little more considerate. If I bear it, I can protect everyone... I can make everyone happy.”

Sid silently watched Alma talking like she was trying to convince herself.

“Also, I’m not even that sad about it. After all, repressing my feelings and enduring everything for the country and the people is what I’ve always done. The only difference is that it won’t be as a man. I’ll be a woman now. It’s my

only option. I have no other choice.”

Sid still said nothing.

“Sir Sid... I’m really grateful that you devoted your sword to someone as insignificant as me until now. However, as I thought, I’m not fit to be the master of a great knight like you. And yet, because you’re so kind, you served me nonetheless... Even if it was temporary, I’m really glad to have been your lord... So...” The more she talked, the more tears started to spill from her eyes.

Suddenly, Sid, who had been silent until now, opened his mouth. “Are you really fine with this?”

Alma raised her face, taken aback. With his usual gentle expression, Sid looked at her with profound eyes that seemed like they could see through everything. He wasn’t reprimanding or pitying her. His only intention was to face *Alvin* frankly as a knight.

“Huh...?”

“I’m asking you if you’re really fine with this.” Sid suppressed a laugh as he watched Alma blink. “Well, how do I put this? It’s weird. It’s not like you.”

“Huh...?”

“The lord I pledged allegiance to in this era is...well, still an immature and unreliable chick, but at least she had the resolve to walk on her own and to clear her path with her own sword. As a knight, that’s what charmed me about you. That’s why I broke my oath to have Arthur be my only master and chose to serve you.”

Alma stayed silent.

“And, well, in this case, it’s not like you. It’s your only option? You have no other choice? No, you’ve just been influenced by your surroundings and were gradually forced to make this choice. What about your true feelings? I didn’t hear anything about them. That’s why I’m asking you: Are you really fine with this?”

Alma didn’t reply.

“I’m not dissatisfied, and I’m not complaining about you choosing Young Wolf

or that you stopped aiming to become king. No, my problem is that you said, 'It's my only option' instead of 'That's what I decided.' That you said, 'I have no other choice' instead of 'That's the path I believe in.' If it were your own choice, I'd say nothing, congratulate you, and continue to use my sword for you. However...that's not the case, right?"

Alma stayed quiet.

"In the first place, 'For the country' and 'For the people...' Isn't that too vague as a plan? You really think a man like Young Wolf, who's so self-centered that he thinks the whole world is his, would listen to a woman just because she's his wife? He's a natural-born domineering husband. I'm sure he'd give tons of excuses to make a mess of the kingdom, just like the other countries. You would understand if you were thinking calmly. Arthur was, and will always be, the only king softhearted and foolish enough to let himself be manipulated by women." Sid chuckled, reminiscing with nostalgia.

On the other hand, Alma, who had just spoken of her great resolve, felt anger toward Sid for the first time since meeting him.

"You're the one who doesn't understand, Sir Sid! I'm a woman... I've been hiding it for years, but now everyone knows! There's no way anyone would follow me now! Be it the country or the people!"

"That's what *you* think."

"I-I can't become king anymore! You should already know that the law forbids women to become king!"

"What? You mean that law so old there's practically mold around it?" Sid yawned. "People of this era are misunderstanding how it works. You see, it was decided that women couldn't become king back then because the burden was considered too great. That was the chivalrous thing to do in the past when female knights were pretty rare. But now that there are as many female knights as male knights? The circumstances are completely different. You can't send women to fight wars as knights and yet say they can't become king. That doesn't make sense."

Alma groaned.

“Listen, Alvin. Laws are here for people to be cautious about their weakness, not to restrict them from aiming to better themselves and become stronger.”

Alma’s eyes widened in shock.

“Though, well, I guess there *is* a legal binding force to it, as well as a lot of hard-headed, old-fashioned guys. But Isabella will do something about that. Believe in her. She’s a great and hardworking woman.” Sid’s speech was based on a major assumption—that Alvin didn’t give up on becoming a king in her heart of hearts.

“That’s...that’s...” Alma wept, trembling. “That’s unreasonable... Just how difficult it would be to walk that path...”

“Kinda late for that. Trying to become king while hiding that you were a woman was already pretty reckless,” Sid said, imperturbable.

“I don’t know if someone like me can really protect this country... Maybe even more people would die because of me trying to aim for something beyond my ability...”

“The pressure from the rise and fall of a nation is something that a king must endure. That’s a king’s duty. Even Arthur had to bear it. After all, it was an era where wars decided the fate of the country almost every day.”

“But... Even then, that’s not something anyone should be allowed to—”

“Listen, Alvin. You’re not just anyone. You’re a king,” Sid declared, holding Alma’s shoulders and looking straight into her eyes.

She gasped.

“It doesn’t matter whether you’re a man or a woman. It’s just something a king must bear. You should already have the resolve to become king. What’s important next isn’t whether you have the power to make it possible, but what you want to do as king.”

“Even if all you’ve said is true, I don’t know what to do!” Alma cried, pushing her tear-filled face against Sid’s chest.

“Come on. The answer is obvious,” Sid said brazenly, looking straight into her eyes. “Order me, your knight.”

Alma widened her eyes.

“You just need to become a king who will be everyone’s ray of hope. Imagine a way that will make the people naturally revere you as their king and carry it off. And don’t make any compromise. Aim to create the perfect country of your dreams. That’s how you become everyone’s guiding ray of hope. And it’s my duty as your knight to use my sword to pave your—the king’s—path.”

“Sir Sid!” Alma exclaimed, on the verge of bursting into tears.

Sid gently patted her head, as if trying to soothe his adorable granddaughter, then continued. “That’s why I said it wasn’t like you. You still didn’t give a single royal decree.” He paused. “What is your objective as king? What do you want to do? What do you want *me* to do? What are your true feelings, and...what should you do?”

Alma stayed silent as she confronted her inner heart. She thought really, really hard. I should do that, I have no other choice, that’s the most rational way, I’m a woman, I can’t do it—she pushed all these noises aside and searched for the naked ore sleeping in the depths of her heart. And after a long silence, the answer she excavated was...

“I can’t entrust the kingdom to Prince Wolf...”

Sid listened quietly.

“It’s true that if I marry Prince Wolf and we become vassals to the empire, we may be able to escape from the threat that is the northern demon kingdom... But then, the people wouldn’t be happy... They would just be made to live as the empire wants, their freedom stolen, their wealth exploited, and they’ll be kept like slaves and suffer. I can’t shut my eyes and ignore that! I want to protect this country in the true meaning of the word! For that, the Kingdom of Calvania needs to stay independent... If I don’t protect our freedom and pride, the nation and the people won’t have a future!”

“Well then, what’ll you do?” Sid asked one last time.

Alma raised her head and looked straight at him. “Here’s my royal decree! In the name of *Alvin* Noll Calvania, descendant of the noble Holy King Arthur, I order you! Sir Sid, win the Premier Chevalier tournament! Prove to the world

that the kingdom's knights are far better than the empire's! Protect this country from the empire's invasion... Fight together with me!" Alma—no, Alvin—announced, her voice back to its usual masculine tone.

Sid grinned. Then he reverently kneeled before her, put his hand on his chest, and declared, "Yes, my lord. I swear on my life." Then he raised his head and looked at Alvin with a wry smile. "Jeez, you're so needy. Just do that from the start."

"Sir Sid... I'm so sorry..." Alvin said, crying.

"Why are you apologizing?"

"Because... I'm being so selfish..."

"A king must be willful."

"But it's reckless... Who would follow me when I make such a foolish choice? In the worst case, we might be the only two opposing the empire, Sir Sid..."

"Don't worry. I'm used to it." He smiled like a mischievous boy. "Even during the legendary era, it was only Arthur and me when we raised the army at first. Compared to how foolish and reckless that was, the current situation is nothing."

"Aha ha ha... You're really... Aha ha ha ha!" Alvin couldn't help but laugh. "I truly feel like I can do anything as long as you're with me, Sir Sid... Thank you. I'm delighted that you are my knight."

"Your words are wasted on me." He stood up and firmly struck Alvin's shoulder. "However, Alvin. You said that it might be just the two of us, but I don't think so."

"Huh...?"

"Well, just prepare yourself. What will be will be."

They returned to Alvin's room. Alvin changed to her usual squire uniform, used the magic comb to shorten her hair, and took back her fairy sword, hanging it at her waist. Then, as she left the room with Sid...

“Alvin!”

Countless people were waiting for her outside. It was the Blitze class students with Tenko leading them.

“Wh-Why are you all here...?” Alvin blinked in surprise.

Suddenly, everyone kneeled.

“Huh?!”

“Alvin. Everyone here chose you as their lord and swore to share their fate with yours. Please, accept our swords,” Tenko declared formally, which was unlike her.

“Yeah, I’m gonna follow you. After all, you’re the one who picked me up,” Christopher said, resolved.

“You are the only king we can entrust the future of this country to. Not to the three ducal houses and the empire’s arrogant prince.” Elaine smiled boldly.

“Me too... The only way to really protect my family... The only one who would protect them is you, Prince Alvin! S-So... I’m scared, but...!” Though nervous as usual, Lynette showed her determination.

“It’s too difficult to understand everything that’s happening, but my life is yours, Prince! It doesn’t matter whether you’re a man or a woman! I-In fact, being a woman is more... Eeep!” Yuno squealed innocently, as carefree as ever.

Other First Squires also pledged their allegiance one after another. And, finally...

“You know, my objective is to climb the ladder of this country,” Theodore said, standing a little ways away from everyone. “Frankly, choosing your side in such a situation is far too reckless. I think it’s a hundred times better to switch to the three dukes. But...I don’t hate bets with low odds,” he said, a little shyly, then kneeled before Alvin. “I thought calmly about it, and... Well, I realized that I don’t think anyone other than you is fit to be the king of this country. Hmph, don’t disappoint me, Alvin.”



“E-Everyone...” Alvin blinked, surprised to have so many people on her side.

Sid struck her shoulder firmly. “See? I told you. You’re more worthy of being king than you think. Have more confidence in yourself.”

“Sir Sid...”

“Anyway, I guess that for now, I should win the Premier Chevalier tournament.” Sid cracked his neck. “Time to take down that arrogant kid. I’m gonna show him how much resolve and determination our lord has. We can talk after that.”

“Y-Yes! I’m counting on you!”

The kingdom was in chaos, and Sid, who had refused to participate until now, announced his entry in the Premier Chevalier tournament following Alvin’s royal decree.

“So what?”

“Nothing will change even if he wins.”

“It’s just a woman trying to act brave.”

Such were the opinions of everyone, regardless of being for or against the royal family.

Time flowed, and finally, the fateful day of the Holy Spirit’s Advent Festival arrived.

Chapter 5: The Holy Spirit's Advent Festival

The Holy Spirit's Advent Festival was a traditional event held at the start of spring, the 21st of Marche. That day was said to be the day Éclair, the fairy god of light, descended upon this world, where only winter existed, and brought spring for the first time.

For the kingdom's people, who were believers of Éclair, it was a very important festival. Of course, some people thought it was inappropriate to hold the event, given the situation. However, the Ladies of the Lake were in charge of the festival, and their chief, Isabella, firmly disagreed. Nobody knew why she was so adamant about it.

Regardless, the Holy Spirit's Advent Festival was meant to celebrate Éclair and the coming of spring, so everyone decided to pass the day respecting old traditions.

They put wreaths made from sacred whitethorns on their southern windows, and they burnt aromatic trees such as palo santo and sandalwood as well as candles made of turpentine. Families went to shrines dedicated to fairies, were baptized, then prayed by singing in front of the altar to show their thanks to the fairies. After that, they would take branches of alder trees and make them float in the Centoll River, which passed through the capital and was said to go deep into the fairy world.

In the castle, too, various ceremonies were held by the Ladies of the Lake. Under the watchful eyes of the knights and the nobles, Alvin, descendant of the Holy King Arthur, who was granted the blessing of Éclair, kneeled in front of the altar and prayed to the fairy god of light. The Ladies of the Lake prayed too and danced.

All these strange customs were respected by all the citizens. Since the morning, a solemn atmosphere reigned over the capital. In truth, most of the meanings behind the customs had been lost with time, but having been transmitted from parents to children since time immemorial, nobody actually

questioned them.

Then, once the morning passed, it was time for the afternoon revelry.

Fires were lit here and there, and people danced around them. Children disguised as fairies went around the town asking adults for candy. Countless stalls were lined on the roads, alcohol was freely given from the castle, entertainers showed their art, and such. The entire capital was brimming with activity.

Certainly, the kingdom was in a critical situation. Maybe they wouldn't be able to hold the festival again the next year. However, that was why they had to enjoy the one this year as much as possible. Such were the thoughts of the faithful and proactive citizens as they made this festival brim with more activity than the previous years. Or maybe, they just wanted to forget the painful reality for even an instant.

Finally, inside the clamor, many citizens of the capital crossed the bridge toward the Calvania Castle, aiming for the arena built for the Premier Chevalier tournament and dedicated to the Holy Spirit. It was also one of the essential ceremonies of the Holy Spirit's Advent Festival. The arena had been built even before the legendary era and was only used for the Premier Chevalier tournament. The rest of the time it was forbidden to enter it.

Everyone came to see who would become the strongest knight in the country. To the people, knights were like heroes, so they were greatly interested in seeing who would stand at the top—even more so, considering this year's tournament would decide the fate of the kingdom. The people couldn't help but be concerned about the tournament, and their number was far greater than any year before it.

And, in a part of the cone of audience seating that encircled the round field, in the front row, was a luxurious terrace for nobles higher than the other seats.

"It's finally starting... The fight that will decide the fate of this country..." Alvin said and sighed as she looked down.

A giant idol of Éclair, which was on the opposite side, directly in front of Alvin, was also looking down at the round field at the center. Alvin, being born in the kingdom, was also quite pious toward the fairy god of light. That's why, even if

she didn't want to overly depend on the divine, she couldn't help but want to pray right now.

Whether Sid won the tournament or not, the kingdom would be in trouble. Alvin's true fight would only start once the day was over. Was it really fine for her to walk this path? Wouldn't it be better for her to bow to Wolf, obey him, and entrust the kingdom to him? Such ill thoughts kept coming and disappearing in her mind.

But... Sir Sid... The path I truly believe in is...

"Prince Alvin," a voice called, interrupting her thoughts.

She turned toward it and found Wolf and the three dukes. Wolf, being a noble visitor from the empire, and the three dukes, being at the top of the kingdom, naturally had seats reserved for them here.

"Oh, if it isn't Prince Wolf and the dukes." Alvin immediately changed her mindset and made a dignified courtesy bow. "I thank you for coming to watch my kingdom's prized traditional event. Your knight is participating too, so please, watch at your leisure."

"What is the meaning of this, Alvin?" Wolf asked, irritated.

"Hmm? What could you possibly mean?" Alvin feigned ignorance.

"Why did you have Sid Blitze enter the Premier Chevalier tournament?"

She didn't reply.

"I went out of my way to teach you a lesson, and yet, you still don't understand? What is your intention in going against me, your future husband?" He glared at Alvin, but she was undaunted. "It's impossible for my white knight to lose, but the fact that you're acting so rebellious is unpleasant. Don't oppose me. Don't spoil my mood. Stop your vain struggle, and accept reality. Obey me, and try to please me. If you do, then I—"

"I'm sorry, Prince Wolf, but you're the one who should face reality," Alvin declared, glaring back at Wolf. Her strong gaze made him wince a little. "My answer is in the form of the royal decree I gave to my most trusted knight, Sir Sid. He will definitely become the Premier Chevalier and gain the kingdom's

freedom and independence. You won't tell me that you, the ruler of a nation, forgot the words you said publicly?"

Wolf grimaced.

"I will never become yours. The kingdom won't surrender to the empire. This is my will, as well as the nation's collective opinion. Stop your insolence, and mind your words." Alvin completely rejected Wolf, which shocked him greatly.

"You are the insolent one, you false prince!"

The three dukes' faces were flushed with anger.

"You are truly shameless! To think you would still try to become king!"

"Allow me to return your words, *Princess*. You are the one who should face reality. You should stop doing something as improper as disguising yourself as a man."

"Indeed! In this country, a woman like you can't become king!"

"Aha ha ha! As they say! This is impossible for you!"

"You should know that the law is absolute. There hasn't been a single woman king."

The three dukes spoke triumphantly.

However, Alvin didn't waver. She confidently asserted, "Then I will become the first woman king in Calvania's history."

"What?!" the three dukes exclaimed in shock, seeing Alvin being so bold.

"S-Stop fooling around! What do you think laws are for?!"

"You really let yourself get carried away just because you have a knight from the legendary era!"

"Are you not ashamed to rely so much on Sir Sid? You are powerless on your own."

"Indeed! You are just borrowing someone else's power! This isn't your own!"

And, as the dukes continued to insult her...

"I don't want to hear that from pigs feeding off the empire's power."

The dukes were speechless.

“Indeed, I’m powerless and can’t do anything on my own. However, I can’t ignore the grief and the suffering that awaits my people if I do nothing. Even if I’m powerless and not qualified to be king, I swore on my pride as the Holy King Arthur’s descendant that I would save this nation and its people even if I have to sacrifice myself. And, even knowing how absurd and reckless I was, Sir Sid endorsed the path I am aiming for and pledged his sword to me. That means we both share our fates. My life is Sir Sid’s, and his life is mine. In that case, how is it a problem to borrow his power?”

The three dukes groaned, seeing Alvin’s resolve. They were overwhelmed by her ambition and didn’t know what to say.

Who is this woman...? Wolf looked at her in doubt. Is that really Alvin...? Princess Alma...?

Wolf couldn’t match the person before him with the image he had of her. To him, she was a lovely, delicate, and innocent girl he had to protect. She wasn’t supposed to face adversity, and she definitely wasn’t supposed to hold a sword to fight on her own. She should be under his protection, in a place he made for her happiness, where she wouldn’t think of anything and just smile innocently. No, she *had* to be like that.

I hate cheeky women who oppose me. Women should just shut up and listen to men. That’s why I broke her spirit... And yet, in just a few days, she totally changed! It’s like she’s a different person! What happened?!

According to his plan, Alvin should have returned to being Princess Alma and become obedient to him. Or rather, considering the current situation, it would be strange for her not to. And yet...

Just what hap—?! Just as Wolf began to tremble from irritation and impatience, someone appeared, interrupting his thoughts.

“Yo, Alvin. You okay?” Sid arrived, scratching his head. Normally, only royalty and great nobles could come to this terrace, so he shouldn’t have been here, but Sid wasn’t one to care about such things.

“Ah, Sir Sid!” Alvin ignored Wolf and the dukes and happily approached Sid.

“Did something happen?”

“Nah, I just thought that rather than watching from this reeking place, you should come to where the other Blitze class students are.”

“Aha ha, you’re right. This place is indeed filled with garbage.” She chuckled. “Unfortunately, I have to stay. That’s my duty as king.”

“I see. You have it hard.”

“More importantly, are you fine coming here?”

“Hmm?”

“I mean, the fight will begin soon. Shouldn’t you be preparing?”

“Don’t worry. I’ll be fine,” he said, gently patting Alvin’s head, who happily accepted it. Then he turned back, and declared, ““A knight tells only the truth’... I’ll win.”

“I believe you. May you earn glorious victories,” she prayed, believing in Sid’s victory from the bottom of her heart, as she watched him go away.

Wolf gritted his teeth because of what he just saw. *I see... It’s because of this man... Sid Blitze!*

He was the man renowned as the legendary era’s strongest knight and had been resurrected in the current era. It was his fault that Alvin didn’t face reality and clung to her hopes that were as fragile as a house of cards. He was the reason she wouldn’t become Wolf’s.

I won’t forgive you! To think that a low-born knight would dare disregard me and monopolize my Princess Alma’s affection! I’ll never forgive you! I’m Wolf Noll Dragnir of the Dragnir Empire! I’m the best man in the world! Alma’s smile and love should only be mine! That man doesn’t deserve them! Wolf thought, filled with intense rage and resentment.

Then he left the terrace and went underground below the arena and muttered, “You’re here, white knight?”

The next instant, as if they had been hidden by magic, the white knight suddenly appeared from the darkness. As always, they were hiding their appearance with their white full-plate armor as they stood silently before Wolf.

“I order you to kill Sid Blitze.”

The white knight didn’t reply.

“You can make it look like an accident during the battle. It shouldn’t be difficult for you, right? Show everyone how miserable he is as you beat him to death,” he said, his eyes filled with a dangerous glint.

The white knight stayed silent for a few seconds, and then they nodded. During a brief instant, exasperation and scorn could faintly be sensed from them. However, Wolf was far too preoccupied with his jealousy and rage toward Sid to notice.

Somewhere in Calvania Castle, there was a ceremonial room entirely made of stone and as big as a reception hall. It must have been underground, as there weren’t any windows. Naturally, that meant the room was dark. The torches on the walls, the bonfires lined up at regulated distance on the floor, and the light emanating from the will-o’-wisps illuminated the room in a fantastical way.

A large Torah-style magic circle, formed with Espirish runes and a triangle in the middle, was carved on the floor and emanated a strange power. It was so huge it was impossible to see it in its entirety.

And, in the center of the room—which was also the center of the magic circle—were an altar and a tall stone monument with sentences in Espirish carved on its surface.

It was a strange room that somehow combined sanctity and uneasiness.

Inside the room, many Ladies of the Lake were performing a task.

“All the preparations are done,” a Nimue reported to Isabella, who was supervising everyone.

“Good work. How is the festival in the capital going?”

“There isn’t any problem. In fact, more people are attending than usual.”

“Good...” Isabella took a breath, relieved. “Considering the situation, it wouldn’t have been strange for the people to not care about the Holy Spirit’s Advent Festival, after all.”

“As you say.”

“Now, we just need to go through the Premier Chevalier tournament dedicated to Éclair, and once we have a winner, this year’s ritual will be over.”

The battles between the knights—offered to the fairy god of light—were the most important part of the festival’s ritual. On a side note, eastern countries apparently had a similar ceremony where they offered a dance called kagura to their god.

“It truly was a difficult festival, considering all the misfortunes that befell us, and yet, you all did splendid work. As the chief of the Ladies of the Lake, you have my deepest gratitude.”

“N-No, you don’t have to! We are here to serve you, Lady Isabella!” the young Nimue replied, flustered. “But...can I ask you a question?”

“Yes?”

The young Nimue hesitated for a few seconds, not sure if it really was fine for her to ask such a thing, but unable to contain herself, she asked, “Well, umm...as you said, we’ve had a lot of troubles this year. The empire invaded, the three dukes betrayed us, and it was revealed that Prince Alvin is...well, a woman...”

“Indeed.”

“So, I wondered... Was there truly a need to hold the Holy Spirit’s Advent Festival this year? Couldn’t we have suspended it?” As she said that, she noticed that Isabella was staring at her, and she became flustered. “Ah, no, umm, I am not saying that we should not have held the festival! It’s just that...I am worried about you, Lady Isabella! You are already occupied with the countermeasures against the empire, and yet, you also led all the preparations for the festival... I fear you might collapse from overwork!”

Isabella stayed silent. As the young Nimue had pointed out, her complexion wasn’t good, due to having spent many days working without sleep or rest.

“And yet, you continue to work...”

“Thank you for your concern, Libella,” Isabella said with a smile. “But don’t

worry. I'm fine. The one who is truly suffering is Prince Alvin, who has been forced into that role because of the previous king and our decision. Compared to what she went through, this is nothing."

"Lady Isabella..."

"Also," Isabella's expression stiffened, "the Holy Spirit's Advent Festival must be held every year, even if the kingdom were to be destroyed. Though, I guess it wouldn't be possible in that case," she added with a wry smile.

"Huh?! Why?" Libella cocked her head. "Isn't that strange? I do understand the importance of praying to Éclair, being a Nimue, but is there really a need to go that far?"

"Libella. We, the Ladies of the Lake, serve the descendants of the Holy King Arthur as per our ancient pledge. We are the priestesses linking the royal family and Éclair. You do know that, right?"

"Huh? Y-Yes, of course!"

"And you also know that, as per our old traditions, the chief of the Ladies of the Lake inherits many secrets orally?"

"Y-Yes!"

"You are one of the candidates selected to succeed me, so I will teach you one of them. 'Secret number ninety-nine: the Holy Spirit's Advent festival must never be stopped. If it does, a deathly winter will befall this world.'"

"Huh?!" Libella jumped in shock. "Wh-What does that mean?!"

"I don't know." Isabella shook her head. "Lady Eva, my master and the previous chief of the Ladies of the Lake, died mysteriously before she could impart everything to me."

Libella knew Eva's name. It was said she had overwhelming mana, surpassing everyone else, and her magic skills were peerless. She was renowned as the strongest chief priestess in history. It was even rumored that she rivaled the Nimues of the legendary era.

"The clause about the Holy Spirit's Advent Festival's secret was most likely among the ones she didn't tell me, so we will never know..."

“I-I see...”

“When she told me that the festival should be held, even at the cost of my life, Lady Eva seemed to be really frightened by something. I can’t think that she would be so scared just because of some old traditions and rules. After all, she was the one who said we should change the law to allow women to become king. And that was before Prince Alvin’s birth.”

“She was that kind of person?” Libella said, impressed. “In that case, this is even more ominous...”

“Indeed. However,” Isabella smiled to reassure Libella, “as long as we hold the festival correctly, there shouldn’t be any problem. Everything should be fine.”

“I hope so...”

“Anyway, the Premier Chevalier tournament should begin soon. Our ritual is entering its final stage, so let’s do our best. Our true fight will be after the festival is over.”

“Y-Yes!” Libella replied energetically and they both went back to work.

Finally, the traditional ceremony and main event of the Holy Spirit’s Advent Festival, the Premier Chevalier tournament, started.

The participating knights were all gathered on the field at the center as the opening ceremony was held. They were all the strongest knights of the kingdom, and naturally, Sid and the white knight were among them.

The audience seats were full. There weren’t only citizens but also regular knights and all the students of the Calvania Royal Fairy Knight Academy. That was natural. After all, the fate of the kingdom would be decided during the tournament. Everyone couldn’t help but be concerned about it.

“Damn it... In the end, we can only rely on Sir Sid...” Christopher said, gritting his teeth.

“Only official knights can participate. As squires, there is nothing we can do,” Elaine commented.

“Still, I wonder if Sir Sid can really win.”

“Theodore?! You doubt master’s strength?!” Tenko shouted, hearing Theodore’s bitter whisper. “It’s true that the empire’s white knight is strong, but master will never lose one-on-one!”

“Of course, I don’t think Sir Sid would lose one-on-one. But here, it’s *one against everyone else*.”

“Huh? What do you mean?”

“Tenko, you sure you’re all right? Feels like the more your swordsmanship improves, the dumber you get.” Theodore sighed, then started to explain. “The tournament is to decide the kingdom’s strongest knight, which means everyone here has a fairy sword. A normal knight can’t participate. And fairy knights are all parts of the Red, Blue, and Green Knights Orders. That is to say, they’re all on the three dukes’ side. The only fairy knights in the royal faction are squires like us. So, basically, not only the white knight, but everyone here is Sir Sid’s enemy.”

Tenko gasped.

“And the Premier Chevalier tournament is in the battle-royale style. Everyone on the field fights at the same time, and the last one standing is the winner.”

“This system was adopted to not only test strength but luck too. This way, the Premier Chevalier would be the strongest knight loved by Éclair. It has its pros and cons, but this is the rule, so it must be followed,” Elaine added.

“And, what do you think the three dukes’ knights would do when their masters are on the empire’s side? The answer should be obvious,” Theodore continued.

“Well...of course, they’re going to gang up on Sir Sid...” Christopher realized.

“No way!” Tenko finally understood, and her fox ears straightened. She gritted her teeth in anger and shouted, “It’s a tournament to decide the one with the honor to be the Premier Chevalier! Isn’t it supposed to be a sacred fight where everyone puts aside their faction and fights for their own glory and victory using all their sword skills and magic?!”

“Well, these well-mannered people betrayed us and defected to the empire,” Theodore said with scorn. “Still...is that white knight really that strong?”

“I only caught a glimpse of his strength, so I can’t be sure...” Tenko answered. “However, there’s no doubt that he’s strong. I felt the same pressure from him as master and Sir Rifis, so he’s at least at the level of a knight from the legendary era. He’d kill me in an instant.”

“Th-That strong...?”

“I-If Tenko, who is the strongest among us, says that, it must be true...”

Yuno and Lynette shivered.

“The white knight isn’t the only threat,” a voice said from behind them.

“Louise?! Johan and Olivia too?!”

They were the Second Squires from the Ortol, Anthalo, and Durande classes.

“Hmph, we’ll watch with you. Honestly, as someone receiving instruction from Sir Sid, I feel out of place in my class.”

“Yeah, we were class presidents in our first year, but they demoted us when we moved up a grade.”

“They’re not even trying to hide their disdain...”

Louise, Johan, and Olivia said as they sat next to the Blitze class students.

“Hey, Louise. What did you mean when you said the white knight wasn’t the only threat?” Christopher asked.

She sighed. “Well, I guess always being with Sir Sid clouded your judgment. You shouldn’t look down on the Fairy Knight Order so much.” She paused, then started to explain. “The top of the Knight Order is mainly made up of Atzilt and Beriah-ranks. They’re la crème de la crème. They have a lot of experience fighting against monsters and dark knights. Usually, they’re away from the capital, protecting the country, but they’ve been called back to participate. And, just so you know, even as an Atzilt-rank myself, I’m nothing next to them. Even if they follow the traditional way of over-relying on their fairy swords, they’re strong.”

“Yeah. Before seeing Sir Sid fight and understanding what true strength was, I believed they were what strong knights should be.”

“There are 108 participants. Even if I agree that Sir Sid wouldn’t lose if he fought them one-on-one in turn, I’m not sure about everyone at the same time...”

Johan and Olivia added with serious expressions, making the Blitze class students uneasy.

“M-Master will be fine...right?” Tenko said anxiously as she watched Sid, who stood alone, isolated from everyone.

The strongest fairy knights of the kingdom were gathered on the arena’s field. They were all wearing red, blue, or green costumes and fairy swords of the same colors, ready to fight. The opening ceremony had finished, and the battle was almost beginning. The atmosphere was strained, full of tension. And in such a situation...

“Haaa... I wanna sleep...” Sid was the same as usual. He yawned, sitting cross-legged on the field.

He looked around and noticed that almost everyone was glancing at him with hostility. It felt like he had jumped in the middle of the enemy’s army. However, he acted like he didn’t notice anything. He ignored everyone as he searched for a certain person. He found them immediately, their presence being different from everyone else.

Found you. Sid looked at the opposite side of the field, where the white knight was. They were, of course, wearing their white full-plate armor and full-face helmet hiding their features. However, their eyes could be seen from the gap of their visor and were looking straight at Sid.

Sid sharpened his senses and probed them. *Hmm? This weird feeling... They’re using magic to hide their identity, and quite a strong spell.*

Because of the magical obstruction, Sid’s sharp senses couldn’t grasp the white knight’s presence nor the color of their mana and its wavelength. However, Sid was a knight from the legendary era. He sharpened his senses even more and, though it was faint, he did manage to find something.

As I thought. They’re as strong as knights from the legendary era. What’s

more... I feel like I met them somewhere before... He was sure of it. The magical obstruction made it difficult to grasp, but the white knight's mana was something that Sid already sensed before. But when and where was it? He felt like it was far in the past and recent at the same time.

He wondered where this strange feeling of déjà vu came from, and he tried to probe the white knight again, but...

Hmm? He noticed that, even though all the knights here looked at him with hostility and bloodlust, the white knight was different. He was truly surprised as, being Wolf's knight, they should be the most hostile person here.

Trying to understand why, Sid continued to stare at the white knight until, suddenly, they turned away. As he wondered about the white knight's strange behavior...

"So you're Sid Blitze?"

Three knights appeared before him. They looked down on him with bloodlust.

Sid blinked and asked, "Err...who are you?"

"You live in this country and don't know who we are?!" the woman dressed in blue shouted. "I am Aigis Ortol. Next head of the Ortol house and best knight of the Blue Knights," she oppressively presented herself.

"My name is Caim Anthalo. I'll be the next Duke Anthalo, and I stand at the top of the Green Knights," the good-looking man dressed in green said with a calm smile.

"And I'm Burns Durande. Same as them, I'm the next head of the Durande house and the best of the Red Knights. Also... I'm last year's Premier Chevalier," the muscular man dressed in red said intimidatingly.

"Oh? You're the children of the three dukes?" Sid rubbed his chin as he observed them.

They all had different kinds of fairy swords. Aigis had a longsword, Caim a spear, and Burns a greatsword. Naturally, they were all Atzilt-ranks.

They all have good fairy swords and seem pretty strong. At the very least, my students still don't hold a candle to them, Sid thought, then asked, "So? What

do you want?"

"Hmph. You don't know your place and are getting carried away, so as your seniors, we came to give you a warning."

"You do realize that if someone is a senior here, it's me, right? Not that I intend to show off about it," Sid retorted but was ignored.

"It seems like you played quite an active role in the capital's defense, but that was only because we were away."

"We're troubled that you're acting pretentious while we, the true strongest, are absent."

"We heard that you don't even have a fairy sword."

"I wonder why Mother is so cautious about someone as ordinary as you..."

"Don't tell me you thought that the strength of the capital's knights represented the strength of every knight of the kingdom?"

"We're always fighting against monsters, barbarians, and the dark knights from the northern demon kingdom. We're different from the weak knights of the capital."

"I don't know what is so great about knights of the legendary era, but prepare yourself."

"As the current heads of our houses want, we'll thoroughly crush you."

"Ha ha ha ha! We're gonna show your despair to the whole audience!"

They said whatever they wanted to Sid, but he wasn't listening. The reason was that the white knight was looking in this direction and Sid sensed some anger and irritation in their gaze. However, something was strange.

It's not toward me, but...these three? Sid turned his attention back to the three, and they were still criticizing and insulting him. He didn't care about that, but that didn't explain the white knight's reaction. Sid should be their enemy, and the others their allies. So why would they feel anger toward them?

Hmm... I thought I just needed to win, and that'd be it, but it seems like there are some hidden purposes and troubles awaiting in this tournament... Sid

mused, completely ignoring the three knights insulting him. He didn't care about them, but the white knight had piqued his interest.

At last, the beginning of the tournament had come.

Though it had become an event deciding the fate of the kingdom, the audience couldn't help but feel excited about the tournament to select the best knight of the country. They cheered as the gong signaled the beginning.

The knights bowed toward the statue of Éclair, unsheathed their fairy swords, and pointed them toward the sky. Then they dispersed and prepared themselves to fight.

"One, two... One, two..." Sid, on the other hand, stretched his legs and didn't touch his obsidian iron sword. "Man, it's been a while since I had this kind of battle. How should I go about it...? Hmm?" As he stretched his shoulders, he noticed that all the knights were pointing their swords at him.

"Damn it! Do you see that?!"

"So it really turned out like this... This is unpleasant."

"D-Don't you have any pride?! You cowards!"

Christopher and Elaine spoke with irritation while Tenko shouted at the knights, baring her canines.

"There are more than a hundred of the strongest knights of the kingdom, and a lot of them are Atzilt-ranks... Even Sir Sid will have a hard time..." Louise remarked as she observed the field, her brow dripping with sweat.

"Well...yeah, I knew that'd happen," Sid said with a rueful smile as he scratched his head.

As for the white knight, they were the farthest away from Sid and didn't even draw their sword. They were just standing, staring at him.

"Hmm... Well, now I'm curious to see what you'll do," Sid muttered, staring back at the white knight.

“Ha ha ha! Sorry, Sid Blitze, but we’re going to deal with you right away.”

Burns, Aegis, and Caim approached him triumphantly.

“Well, it’s your fault for following a fool like Alvin.”

“By letting the white knight win, our future is guaranteed. Truly, thank you for becoming our stepping stone.”

The three sneered.

“Sorry,” Sid truthfully apologized, slightly bowing with one hand in front of him. “At first, I intended to make it a good match so you wouldn’t lose face, but...”

“What?” the three replied.

“Well, the main dish is waiting for me, so I can’t spend too much time on the appetizers. Forgive me,” he said, staring at the white knight on the opposite side. The other contenders didn’t even register with him.

“We’re appetizers?! How conceited!”

“You think you can win against us all?!”

“Not only do you not know your place, but you’re also a complete fool!”

The three shouted, their faces flushed with anger.

Burns raised one hand and ordered, “Chaaaaaaarge!”

Obeying, around a hundred knights simultaneously raised their fairy swords and invoked their fairy magics. The next instant, the field transformed into hell.

Red hot flames swirled into a storm, hellish cold blew, magma spouted, wind slashes flew, poisonous flowers bloomed, countless fireballs flew, blades made of water danced, giant earth golems leaped from all directions, sharp gems hailed like bullets... A torrent of attacks with destructive power rushed toward Sid.

It was as one would expect of the strongest knights of the kingdom. Their power was such that, even with the death ward, it gave the impression that Sid was going to be erased from this world.

And, in front of such a scene...

“Damn it! That’s bad!”

“M-Master!”

Christopher and Tenko shouted, anxious.

“Hmph. We won.”

“There is no way he can still fight after that.”

“It was far easier than I thought it would be.”

The three knights were certain of their victory.

Everyone thought that, with this, the strongest knight of the legendary era would be eliminated. No, it wasn’t everyone. One person—Alvin—was different. She stared at the field, believing in her knight.

And, the following instant...a thunderous sound rumbled as lightning ran through the battlefield.

“Gyaaaaaaaaah!” around ten knights screamed as they flew into the sky, their bodies covered with lightning.

The audience was speechless as they watched Sid, who had appeared behind the knight’s encirclement, thrusting his right hand in a forward-bent posture with his eyes closed. A trail of lightning remained on the field as if separating the swarm of knights in two.

Then, when the knights that had been sent flying fell to the ground, Burns, Caim, and Aegis finally came back to their senses.

“Wh-What happened?!”

“I-I couldn’t see anything!”

“He was too fast... That’s impossible! How could I, the fastest knight in the kingdom, lose sight of him?!”

They weren’t the only ones who were shocked. The nearly hundred knights

left standing were also staring at Sid's back, not believing what had just happened. True, they had heard the rumors about Sid Blitze, the strongest knight of the legendary era reincarnated in the present day. That he was an extraordinary knight with tremendous strength. However, they thought that he was an old-fashioned knight. That, considering how magic had progressed, he was nothing next to them. They thought that all his unbelievable achievements were just exaggerated rumors made by the royal faction to restrain the three ducal houses.

In the end, they were right. The truth was different from the rumors. Indeed, Sid Blitze was *far stronger* than the rumors said.

"Here I go," Sid declared before transforming into a flash of light.

The next instant, he was on the opposite side of the field and knights were flying in the sky.

"S-Spread out!" a knight shouted.

"What are you doing?! Surround him and attack!" Burns ordered, having come back to his senses.

But it was meaningless. Lightning ran through the field, and each time, knights flew vertically, horizontally, or diagonally, drawing parabolas.

"Shoot! Fire at him!"

"Use magic!"

The knights raised their fairy swords and attacked with magic, trying to stop Sid. Unfortunately for them, Sid, transformed into lightning, was unstoppable. It was like trying to shoot down lightning with a bow—impossible. Not a single magic released by the desperate knights even grazed Sid. Fireballs and wind bullets only managed to reach the afterimages he left behind.

And, as Sid continued to run through the field...

"Gyaaaah!"

Knights were sent flying one after another, their bodies covered with lightning.

"We can't hit him! He's too fast!"

“Let’s try to get closer and use our weapons!”

Having realized that long-range attacks didn’t work, they decided to try close-range attacks. They strengthened their bodies with the mana from their fairy swords and chased after Sid.

However, when they were on the point of reaching him...Sid’s speed increased even more. The way he sped up was truly worthy of the expression “disappearing into the light.”

In an instant, he jumped into the sky and kicked the air to make a sharp turn while swinging his left hand and pushing out his right hand.

“Gyaaaaah!”

Once again, knights were sent flying.

“Just what is he?! What is that man?!”

“Is he really human?!”

“He doesn’t even have a fairy sword...and he isn’t even using a sword at all!”

They were all shocked by what was happening. Still, they continued their suicide attacks on Sid and were blown away, knocked over, kicked down, and instantly knocked out.

“Ha!” Sid didn’t stop. He didn’t show any sign of slowing down.

A flash of light ran through the field, and knights continued to collapse one after another.

“Damn it! I guess we don’t have a choice... Hey, let’s do it!” Burns shouted to Aigis and Caim, still not believing they were losing. “Let’s use a Greater Incantation!”

Greater Incantations were the strongest fairy magics usable with fairy swords. They were only available to people who had mastered their fairy swords. In this case, Burns, Aigis, and Caim being Atzilt-ranks, theirs would be far stronger than the average fairy knight.

“Y-Yes! If we use our Greater Incantations, we should be able to beat him!”

“Yeah! If we all do it at the same time!”

Aigis and Caim replied and readied their fairy swords with Burns. But, just when they were going to start chanting...

“Yo.” Sid appeared before them. Dregs of lightning remained around his body as he raised his hand as if greeting them during a walk.

“What?!”

“Honestly, I’m curious about your Greater Incantations, but...well, I want to go for the main dish as soon as possible,” Sid said. Then he rotated his body and did a reverse roundhouse kick.

With just one kick, he broke the three Atzilt-rank fairy swords to pieces.

“Huh?!” The three knights stiffened, astonished.

Their minds froze, faced with the reality of their prized fairy swords breaking so easily. And, of course, Sid wasn’t one to let such an opportunity go. He vanished from their sight and reappeared behind them and struck their necks.

“I-Impossible...”

“How...?”

“Gah...”

They whispered, their eyes wide open, before collapsing like all the other knights.

And, like this, aside from Sid and the white knight looking at him, nobody else was left standing on the field.

“I-Impossible... How could he beat Burns and the Knight Order’s elites so easily?!”

“Th-This must be a joke, right?!”

“There is no way...”

The three dukes shivered from the shock, not believing what they had just seen.

“O-Our instructor is incredible...”

“He beat them hands down!”

“Hey... What did you say would happen?”

“Aha ha... I suppose our instructor truly is out of the norm...”

“Honestly, he’s so strong it’s off-putting...”

Lynette, Yuno, Christopher, Elaine, and Theodore said with forced smiles, amazed.

“Huh...? I need to surpass *that* in order to confess to master...?” Tenko muttered, her face ghastly pale.

“Ha ha... He really is amazing! It seems that I still mistook what being the strongest of the legendary era meant. But I’ll definitely overtake him one day!” Louise declared. She was so impressed that her clenched fists trembled as she stared at Sid with longing eyes similar to a child.

Sid’s eyes met Alvin’s, who was standing on the terrace for nobles. She gazed at him with complete trust, and Sid returned it with a nod.

“Tsk... You swine...!” Wolf raged, feeling humiliated.

“Well then...” Sid stopped looking at Alvin and turned around toward the white knight, who was standing past hundreds of collapsed knights. “The preliminaries are done. Time to enjoy ourselves with the finale, white knight,” Sid said but received no answer.

According to the rules of the tournament, any knight not getting up after ten seconds was considered eliminated, and the Ladies of the Lake would use magic to teleport them out of the field. And, indeed, one by one, the collapsed knights were enveloped with mana and disappeared.

Sid and the white knight simultaneously started to walk toward each other. When only a few meters were left between them, they stopped and silently glared at each other.

The arena was silent. The audience gulped, watching them.

The match to decide the strongest knight of the kingdom—the Premier

Chevalier—was about to begin.

Chapter 6: Premier Chevalier

Somewhere in the Calvania Castle:

“The Holy Spirit’s Advent Festival will soon be over.” Isabella, who had just finished the ceremony held by the Ladies of the Lake, breathed a sigh of relief.

She looked at the crystal ball that showed Sid and the white knight facing each other. Once their match was over and the Premier Chevalier was decided, the festival would come to an end.

“Good work, Lady Isabella. Here,” Libella said, offering her a drink.

“Thank you.” Isabella accepted it while observing her surroundings.

The giant magic circle on the floor was shining with a huge amount of mana running through it, and at its center was the altar where countless offerings to Éclair, serving as the catalysts of the ritual, were lined up. Bouquets of windflowers, sprigs of bay laurels, water from the Aqua Lake, ceremonious swords made by the Titans, hair from Nimues, and many others.

“The offerings aren’t difficult to obtain, but considering the situation, I am glad we managed to gather them all,” Isabella remarked, thinking about how she still had to deal with Wolf and the empire’s invasion after that. “The last offering is a knight’s valor... I hope Sir Sid will win and become the Premier Chevalier...”

Then, just as she was going to look away from the altar...the offering on top of it grew hazy for an instant. It was so faint that a normal person wouldn’t notice it. However, Isabella’s keen senses did, and she turned back toward the altar.

“D-Did something happen, Lady Isabella?” Libella asked, surprised, but Isabella ignored her and approached the altar silently.

She observed the offerings to Éclair and didn’t notice anything out of place. Everything was where it should’ve been, and nothing was missing. It was just as she had confirmed many times before starting the ceremony.

Still, not being able to ignore the discomfort she felt, Isabella started muttering magic words, and...

“N-No way?! This is...?!”

Sid's overwhelming victory against the 106 strongest knights of the kingdom truly made an impact on the audience. Of course, it would. After all, it had been entirely one-sided, and he hadn't even used his sword.

And now, they were holding their breath, watching him face the white knight. They were sure that, no matter who the white knight was, Sid would win. There was no way that he, the legendary era's strongest knight, would lose. With anticipation and hope, everyone stared at Sid.

Sid and the white knight silently watched each other.

After a while, as if wanting to destroy the silence, “So? You're not coming at me?” Sid asked with composure. “The audience is waiting for our fight. If you won't make your move, I will.” He provoked them, somewhat enjoying himself.

“Sid Blitze.” Finally, the white knight, who had been silent until now, opened their mouth. As always, it was impossible to discern if they were a man or a woman from their voice because of the concealing magic.

“Yeah?”

“You chose to serve the wrong lord. There is someone more worthy to be your master.”

Sid cocked his head. “What? Don't tell me you're asking me to change sides to Young Wolf?”

“Who cares about that fool?” the white knight said.

“Then who?”

Sid didn't understand the white knight. They were supposed to serve Wolf, and yet, they looked down on him. Just who were they?

The white knight didn't answer and silently drew their sword, taking a stance.

The next instant, the atmosphere around them changed. It became heavier, sharper, and colder.

“Oh...?” Sid muttered as he slowly took a low stance.

As if understanding that he was ready, the white knight suddenly disappeared in a gust of wind, rushing straight at Sid. They were so fast that they created shock waves through the ground on their way.

Not even a second later, a loud metallic sound rang out, and sparks flickered, dyeing the world in white and burning the spectators’ eyes.

The white knight glared at Sid from close range, pushing him for dozens of meters. Sid’s shoes left trails on the ground, raising huge clouds of sand. When they finally stopped, the audience’s dazzled eyesight returned to normal. What they saw was...

“That was quite the passionate attack,” Sid commented.

He was holding his obsidian iron sword in a reverse grip, blocking the white knight’s sword with it.

The spectators grew excited as Sid and the white knight locked swords and glared at each other.

“M-Master drew his sword?! No, he was forced to! That means the opponent is *that* strong?!”

“That white knight is really on the level of the knights of the legendary era?!”

“Just who are they...?”

Tenko and Christopher shouted in surprise, and Theodore muttered in wonder.

Sid, who had won against 106 fairy knights without even using his sword, drew it from the start against the white knight. The audience gulped, not knowing how the fight would progress as they watched the two knights glare at each other.

“Ha!” The white knight pushed Sid away with a yell and took some distance.

Then, leaving behind an after image, they once again attacked Sid with a quick upward slash from the low alber stance.

A metallic sound rang out.

Sid had blocked the blow, swinging his sword down in reverse grip. However, the white knight didn't stop there. They rotated their body and did three meteor-like downward slashes from the opposite direction.

Another three metallic sounds rang out.

Sid had blocked and warded off the three blows. But the white knight didn't leave him time to breathe and launched a quick and sharp attack at Sid's right hand as it held his sword. However, he immediately turned his hand and received the attack with the guard of his sword, making yet another metallic sound and creating sparks.

The white knight pushed down Sid's sword while preparing to make an upward slash, but before that, Sid let go of his sword and squatted down while rotating his body, allowing him to avoid the white knight's attack. Then he grabbed his falling sword with his left hand, and, using the momentum from rotating his body, swept at the white knight's feet. His swing was so fierce that it tore the air and created a mini storm.

The white knight gasped in surprise but managed to avoid the attack by leaping in the sky, doing a summersault, then landing dozens of meters away. However, there already was a line of lightning under their feet.

With a thunderclap, Sid transformed into a flash of light and rushed at the white knight using Lightning Legs.

Faced with the lightning-fast slash, the white knight immediately created a barrier made of mana and blocked it. The impact created a huge explosion as both of their mana clashed with each other. The wind pressure was such that it reached the spectators, making them tremble.

"You're good," Sid said with admiration, his sword still against the mana barrier, but the white knight stayed silent, glaring at Sid. It was only after Sid jumped back that they released the barrier.

Their exchange had only lasted a few seconds, but it had been of a very high

level. Everyone forgot about their factions and just focused on Sid and the white knight's battle, forgetting even to blink. The Premier Chevalier tournament had been blemished by the three dukes, but ironically, it had taken back its true meaning at the hands of a foreign knight that shouldn't have been participating in it.

As they glared at each other...

"I see, I know who you are now," Sid said in realization, his voice low enough for only the white knight to hear him.

The white knight gasped in surprise.

"I kinda had a feeling this might be the case, but now I'm sure of it. I know you, and we already fought once."

The white knight stiffened for an instant but immediately regained their bearings and replied, "You're bluffing."

"Oh, really?" Sid smiled boldly, taking a low stance while holding his obsidian iron sword in reverse grip once again. "Then let's check the answer with our next exchange."

Sensing Sid's intent to fight, the white knight also took a stance. The overhead vom Tach position this time.

They glared at each other silently. There were around ten meters between them, but they slowly closed that gap, millimeter by millimeter, probing at each other for an opportunity to strike.

As that soul-shaving standoff continued, the audience watched them, holding their breath.

Then, finally, after what felt like an eternity...the two knights disappeared.

The next instant, a spectacular metallic sound rang out, and sparks flickered, dyeing the world in white. Two flashes crossed, then Sid and the white knight reappeared ten meters away from each other, exchanging places this time. They were both at the end of their sword swings, showing their backs to each other.

The spectators looked at them, forgetting even to breathe. Then, suddenly, a

shallow slash wound appeared diagonally on Sid's chest, spouting blood.

However, Sid didn't care about it and just grinned daringly. "That's the answer."

The next instant, the white knight's helmet was cut in two. Following the laws of gravity, both parts fell to the ground, unsealing long silver hair.

"You're Endea, right?" Sid declared, confident, without even turning back to look at her.

The white knight gritted their—no, *her*—teeth in frustration. "It's annoying, but you're right, Sid Blitze," Endea—the mysterious girl with the same face as Alvin, master of the northern demon kingdom—replied.



“E-Endea?!”

“Wh-Why is she here?!”

Alvin and Tenko, who had met her once, exclaimed in surprise.

And, of course, they weren't the only ones who were confused.

“To think that the white knight was a girl...”

“Say... Doesn't she resemble Prince Alvin?”

“J-Just who is she?”

As the spectators were stirring, Endea turned toward Sid and asked, “How did you find out?”

Sid didn't reply.

“The concealing magic Flora used on me was perfect. Nobody should have been able to understand the color of my mana, so how did you...?”

“Your swordsmanship,” he answered easily, turning back to face her. “I never forget the swordsmanship of anyone I fight against.”

“You truly are astounding and out of the norm,” Endea grumbled with a snort.

“Still... In the little while since last time, you really improved... No, that's not it...”

Sid probed Endea with his spiritual sight. Now that she wasn't wearing the helmet infused with the concealing magic, he could feel her mana more easily than before. And yet, there was one thing that he had a hard time making sense of.

“It feels as if you were becoming a totally different being... Say, Endea, what is this power?” As he talked, something poked his memory from the legendary era. He felt like he had already sensed and fought against someone with the same power and presence as Endea but couldn't remember who. “Endea. What are you...no, what is the Dark Order of Opus planning?”

“It has nothing to do with you, Sid Blitze,” she replied flatly. “More importantly, my current objective is you. I came here to meet you.”

Sid cocked his head.

“I didn’t expect my identity to be revealed so fast, but oh well. Anyway, I endured the humiliation of pretending to be that foolish man’s retainer just to be able to meet you. You should feel honored.”

“Oh? Just to meet me? Well, I don’t mind, but what’s your business?” Sid asked, curious. “Doesn’t seem like you want a revenge match for last time.”

“Become my knight, Sir Sid Blitze the Lightning Knight.”

Her words were so unexpected that Sid couldn’t help but blink a few times.

Endea continued, “You chose the wrong lord to serve. It’s a waste for Alvin to have a knight such as yourself. Serve me. I am the one worthy to be your king.”

Sid stayed silent for a while, ruminating, then...

“Sorry, Endea, but my lord is...” Sid tried to refuse, but...

“Please,” Endea—the proud and arrogant girl—pleaded.

“...Endea?”

“Don’t serve Alvin... Don’t look at Alvin!” Little by little, she started to grow excited. “Leave Alvin, and serve me! Look at me and only me!”

Sid stayed silent.

“If you’re angry about what I did before, I’ll apologize and reflect on it! Flora will do something about your contract! You’ll live on my mana and not Alvin’s!”

Sid listened silently.

“If you abandon Alvin and serve me, I’ll give you my everything! I’ll do anything you wish! So, please, Sir Sid! Please!”

Sid looked at Endea’s desperate entreaty without saying a word. She wasn’t lying or joking. She was serious. He didn’t know why, but she truly wanted him by her side.

Sid ruminated about her. She was a mysterious girl who looked just like Alvin. The one the witch of the Dark Order of Opus, Flora, called her master. For reasons unknown to him, she hated Alvin with a passion, and she was obsessed with him.

He remembered something she said during their last encounter.

“You’re the Lightning Knight, aren’t you? Then why don’t you ever come save me?”

Finally, he understood the true meaning of these words. Most likely, it had been an unintentional message from Endea. In other words...

Sid closed his eyes and took a deep breath. Then he opened them, looked straight at Endea, and said, “Sorry. My lord in this life is Alvin. I can’t serve you.”

Endea’s expression changed to despair, as if she just witnessed the end of the world. Sid continued, “But...”

However, as he was going to say “as a knight, I’ll save you,” Endea started to laugh.

“Ha ha ha... Ha ha ha ha...” Her laughter was intermittent, as if something broke in her, but then it became madder. “Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!”

“Endea?”

“Ah, I see! So that’s how it is! You chose Alvin!” she shouted, throwing a tantrum with tears in her eyes. “Why?! Just why?! We’re both the same! And yet, it’s always Alvin who gets everything! What about me?! Alvin is the chosen one, and I’m not?! Enough! That’s enough already!”

Endea’s white armor suddenly broke to pieces and scattered around as her body erupted with dark mana, which formed into large black wings behind her. The dark mana filled the space around her and, like a deadly poison, breached the death ward barrier and destroyed it.

As everyone looked in shock at what was happening, Endea, now in her usual black gothic dress, shook her skirt loose and raised her hand. Darkness appeared before it, and she grabbed something inside and drew it out. It was Endea’s weapon and the strongest black fairy sword, Twilight.

“If you don’t want to become mine, then die, Barbarian!” she cried, her expression mixing rage and sadness, pointing her sword at Sid. “Let’s continue our match! I’ll never give you to Alvin! So, at least I’ll kill you myself! Die

embraced by my winter!”

Endea spread her dark cold mana in the arena like a blizzard, bringing the temperature below freezing and making the dumbfounded spectators tremble from the cold. Her body exuded violent bloodlust and overwhelming dark mana.

Now that she wasn’t using the concealing magic, Sid understood that something was different about Endea. Something about her had fatally changed from the way she was before. If things continued like this, she would never be able to return to normal.

“...Come.” Sid calmly readied his obsidian iron sword.

“Aaaaaaaaaaaaaah!” Endea yelled as she rushed at Sid, her body filled with fierce mana.

The battle currently unfolding was on a whole other level.

Endea, her sword wrapped in dark cold, and Sid, his sword filled with lightning, were violently exchanging blows. Each time Endea swung her sword, the air and the ground froze, and snow blew fiercely. And, each time, Sid quickly matched his sword with hers and used the lightning bursts to purify the corrosive darkness.

They swung their swords downward, upward, and from the side, sometimes thrusting, repelling each other every time. They wielded their blades, running freely around the field as they clashed, making metallic sounds ring out intermittently.

“Aaaaaaaaaaaaaah!”

“Endea!”

It was like a battlefield from hell, where light and darkness fought each other.

Endea, who seemed like a spoiled child throwing a tantrum, continued her attacks as Sid handled them simply.

“Prince Wolf!” Alvin called. “What is the meaning of this?! Why did you make *her* your knight?!”

“Wh-What do you mean?” Wolf tried to look away, but Alvin grasped his collar.

“Don’t play dumb! Look at the power she’s using! It’s obviously a black fairy sword! The power of darkness! And of course, she’s using it! She’s Endea, the northern demon kingdom’s leader!”

Wolf gasped.

“Didn’t you say you would fight against the demon kingdom?! And yet, Endea is on your side! Were you trying to deceive me?!”

“I-I didn’t know!” Wolf barked back. “I didn’t know that the white knight was that woman! I’ve never even seen her face!”

“Wh...what?! That’s absurd!”

“If you want to know more, ask the retainer who presented her to me! I really don’t know anything!”

“Who did it?!”

“I told you before, that a mage offered me the technique to make spirit gears! Well, it’s that *woman* who introduced the white knight to me!”

“A mage...and a woman...” Alvin mused and connected the dots. “It’s Flora!”

Considering the situation, there was no doubt that Flora, the witch of the Dark Order of Opus, was behind this. And that meant something terrible was in the works.

The Imperial Knight Order, who was currently occupying the Langrissa Fort—the kingdom’s last defense—were all using spirit gears. They were using weapons created by Flora. The shrewd and sly witch would never make something that would put the demon kingdom in danger by giving power to the Dragnir Empire.

Alvin had a really bad feeling about this. If this continued, she felt like not only the kingdom, but even the greatest country of the continent was going to fall.

“Prince Wolf! Immediately send a messenger pixie to your army at the Langrissa Fort! Tell them to throw away their spirit gears and go back to the empire!”

“What?!”

“Throw yours away too! If you don’t, something really bad will happen!”

“Stop joking, Prince Alvin!” Wolf shouted, enraged. “Did you get cold feet?! Even if you want to protect your country, there’s no way I’d listen to that!”

“This isn’t the time for that! You don’t understand how crafty and vicious Flora is! If spirit gears were made by her, then they must be dangerous! People shouldn’t use them!”

“Shut up, Alvin!” Wolf barked. The three dukes watched, flustered, as this time, it was Wolf who grabbed Alvin’s collar. “Ah, I see! You’re scared of my knight. You started to think that Sid Blitze is going to lose?”

“No! It’s not about that! Endea isn’t your knight!”

“They’re my knight!” Wolf screamed, not accepting reality. “I don’t know any Endea, but what I do know is that this is my white knight! The strongest knight, who is going to pave my supremacy! They’re the loyal retainer who is going to win the Premier Chevalier tournament and make the kingdom—and you—mine! You’re just a woman, so don’t order me!”

Wolf put his hand on the hilt of his spirit gear and glared at Alvin.

“You still say things like that even in such a situation...” Alvin muttered.

It was hopeless. She didn’t understand why, but Wolf was clearly not sane anymore. No...maybe he hadn’t been sane from the beginning. Anyway, Alvin’s instinct screamed at her that something should be done, and quickly. If they didn’t take away the spirit gears from the empire’s army, she was sure that something terrible would happen. But with Wolf—the one who could give them the order—in such a state, it was impossible.

What should I do?! Alvin panicked.

Isabella was busy with an important ceremony and wasn’t here to help. The three treacherous dukes weren’t going to be useful, and even if all the Blitze class joined forces, they still wouldn’t be able to win against Wolf and his spirit gear.

What should I do...? Alvin thought again, sending a pleading glance at Sid,

who was fighting on the field.

Endea's attacks were fierce, and her seemingly infinite dark mana welled up, blowing frozen waves. Her freezing sword strikes continuously assaulted Sid and, as unbelievable as it was, he was at a disadvantage. After all, even if he blocked each blow, he couldn't stop the cold. His body froze little by little, dulling his movement with each moment.

It was an unavoidable outcome. No matter how fast and robust Sid was, there was no way he could resist that invincible power that could freeze everyone to death equally.

How could Endea become so strong in such a short time...? No, in the first place, who is she...? Alvin repeated questions in her head.

She continued to watch Sid, who, while having a hard time, was still fighting. A normal person would have given up long ago, yet he was still trying to accomplish his oath as a knight. In that case...

The only thing I can do is to believe in Sir Sid...in my knight! she convinced herself.

"Prince Wolf. As the descendant of the honorable Holy King Arthur, I, Alvin Noll Calvania, want to make a new promise. If Sir Sid loses, my mind and body will become yours, and I'll serve you. I'll become a woman you can embrace and dye in your own colors. However, if he wins and becomes the Premier Chevalier, I want you to recognize me as a king, and the empire must dispose of all its spirit gears. Is that fine with you?"

"You've said it." Wolf sneered. "I won't let you go back on your words once you've lost."

"A king never goes back on their words."

"Ha ha ha ha ha ha! Fine! I accept!" He laughed loudly.

Of course he would. After all, it was a very convenient bet for him. Sid was being overwhelmed by his white knight. That meant that agreeing to the new promise assured his possession of Alvin—no, Princess Alma.

"Do it, white knight! Kill Sid Blitze!" Wolf shouted, certain of his victory.

On the other hand, Alvin just looked straight at her knight and muttered, “Sir Sid...”

Sid and Endea’s fierce fight was entering its final stage.

Cold. The arena was astoundingly dark and cold. Even though it was the afternoon of the first day of spring, it was as if it was a midwinter night. Snow blew violently in all directions, and the lurking darkness swallowed the sunlight. If the will-o’-wisps weren’t floating around to illuminate the arena, it would’ve been completely dark.

The spectators’ breath was white as they cleared away the snow piling up on their bodies and heads, trembling from the soul-sucking cold. Naturally, the cause was the dark cold emanating from Endea’s sword. And, if the audience—far away from the field—was *this* cold, then just how cold was the field itself? Maybe it was worthy of being called Cocytus, the freezing hell.

“Haa...” Sid exhaled a white breath, confronting Endea with his sword held in a reverse grip.

Endea, the source of the dark blizzard, stared at him silently. They glared at each other for a while. Then finally, they made their moves.

They were so fast it was as if they had vanished, instantly closing the distance between them. Lightning and darkness crossed, and metallic sounds rang out, shaking the arena. The shock waves they created blew away the snow, scattering it around as they exchanged blows with terrifying speed and power.

But, after a while...Sid was repulsed by Endea’s sword pressure and jumped back three times, retreating. He groaned, enduring the urge to fall to his knees, and stared at Endea. He was at a disadvantage. As time passed, his body was getting duller and duller.

“It’s a shame, Sir Sid. Freezing isn’t the only thing my dark cold does. Not only does it steal heat from your body but also your mana and life force. It truly is the winter of death,” Endea said triumphantly with a grin as she ran her finger along her blade. “You understand, right? The more we fight, the more mana you will lose, making you weaker.”

“Yeah, I noticed,” he replied, looking bitterly at his arms. They were frozen with a thin layer of ice on them. “Most of my blood is already frozen. It won’t take long before I can’t move anymore.”

Sid’s technique, Will, kneaded mana from breathing and the body’s bloodstream. So the more his body and blood froze, the weaker he became. In a way, Endea’s black sword was the natural enemy of Will users. She had the best technique against Sid.

“Also, just to say, you’re quite the monster yourself. A normal fairy knight would freeze to death the instant my dark cold touched them.”

Sid stayed silent.

“Anyway, last time, I still couldn’t control my true power, so I wasn’t a match for you. But now, I’m different.” She scowled at Sid. “Now that I can use a fair bit of my power, I’m not the same anymore.”

Sid listened silently.

“It’s your loss, Sir Sid. This place is ruled by my winter of death. Even you won’t be able to reverse the situation.”

Still, Sid only stared at Endea, taking a stance with his sword.

“Sir Sid... You’re going to die.”

No answer.

“Just saying, but my dark cold isn’t this weak. You might not have noticed, but I went easy on you because I didn’t want to kill you.”

Silence.

“I can raise my power if I want to. I still have a lot to spare. However, you’re at the end of your rope, right?” she asked before suddenly lowering her sword. Then she looked straight at Sid like an abandoned puppy would, and said, “This is the last time. Become my knight, Sid...”

No reply.

“Leave Alvin, and stay by my side. Please. This is truly the last time...” she pleaded.

“Sorry, but I can’t.” Sid shook his head. “My only master in this life is Alvin.”

“I...see...” Endea hung her head. A tear rolled down her cheek, froze, then broke into ice shards and scattered in the wind.

“However,” Sid started, seeing her like this, “if you wish for me to save you, as a knight, I swear I will. ‘A knight tells only the truth.’”

Endea raised her head, her eyes wide open, but before long, she started to tremble and glared at Sid with rage. “Shut up...shut up, shut up, shut up! It’s too late for compassion, and I don’t need your pity! Don’t say things you don’t mean!”

“Endea, I...”

“Enough!” she interrupted, pointing her sword at him. “I understand why you can’t become mine! Then I just need to force you to be beside me! I won’t let Alvin have you! Never!” she screamed like a child throwing a tantrum. Then, holding her sword with both hands above her head, she shouted, “Yu A Deuth Cons Toalight...”

The next instant, a deeper cold darkness spread. It was near infinite and created an even more violent blizzard.

The coldness was far harsher than before. Until just a few seconds ago, it felt as if they had been in spring, but the world’s warmth was stolen, and the temperature dropped, dropped, dropped... It dropped without end. Pillars of ice grew around Endea. They were so big and tall that it was like they were towers trying to reach the heavens.

The field was enclosed in dense darkness, snow, and ice.

“D-Don’t tell me... It’s Endea’s Greater Incantation?!”

“Seriously?! She’s using that *now*?!”

Tenko and Christopher screamed.

“I-It’s suffocating... Is she freezing the air around us too?! Just how powerful is she?!” Louise groaned in pain.

Everyone in the audience trembled in fear, seeing Endea’s power.

And, as they were speaking, it continued to grow.

“Col Sarb Sleis Kilkil Sprin...” she chanted each word slowly and clearly in Espirish, as if ordering the world.

Overwhelming cold filled the arena. Everyone instinctively knew that her incantation should never be finished. However, it was too late. Nobody could stop her. Just getting near her would mean death. Most likely, even Sid’s lightning would freeze in this cold.

As everyone despaired, Sid watched Endea attentively.

Then, finally...

“Deute Thansaude Wintarte!” She ended her chant meaning “Thou art the darkness of twilight governing over all deaths. Swinging this icy sword will kill spring and bring a perpetual winter to the universe.”

Tremendous dark cold waves spread around, with Endea at their center. The overwhelming darkness that could freeze everything encroached upon the world at terrifying speed, covering everything with ice.

It was an omnidirectional attack filling all the space around her. It was impossible to avoid, block, or even flee from it. The moment it was invoked, victory was assured. It was a space where anyone inside would die instantly.

And Sid, who couldn’t do anything, was engulfed.

“Master!” Tenko’s scream echoed in the arena.

Epilogue: The Qualities of a King

In the ritual room for the Holy Spirit's Advent Festival, somewhere in the Calvania Castle:

"Wh-What is this?! What is happening?!" Isabella cried in shock.

"Wh-What is...this...?" Libella whispered the same thing, her face deathly pale. The other Nimues looked the same as they all stared at the altar in the center of the room.

An ancient dragon's horn, a human's skull, a noble-tail's tail, a Titan's eyeballs, Nimue's blood, and many other disgusting things were enshrined on the altar. These had replaced the offerings that were there until just a few seconds ago. Magic manipulating people's perception of things had been used. Something so strong that even Isabella didn't notice anything.

In other words, they had used these repulsive things as catalysts to hold the Holy Spirit's Advent ritual.

"Lady Isabella... It's as if they're sacrifices... Just looking at them makes me sick... This is way too strange..." Libella said, her voice trembling as she stared at the altar.

It felt as if they were shrouded in darkness...as if the anger and resentment of these sacrificed people manifested here. It was such a strange sensation, and it made chills run down their spines just by looking at them.

Isabella used her spiritual senses and discovered the truth. "This can't be... Anthe-Tasithe?!"

"Do you know about this, Lady Isabella?!" Libella asked.

Isabella nodded, sweat dripping from her brow. "It's a forbidden magic used to refine catalysts. By combining hundreds or thousands of the same thing, it amplifies their spiritual value."

"Huh?! Then that means..." Libella trailed off, fearfully.

“Indeed, each one of these is the combination of many sacrifices. They must absolutely not be touched. They’re so cursed that just touching them would take your soul away. We must immediately purify them!” Isabella nervously approached the altar. “Just how many people did the person who made this kill to create sacrifices so strong...?”

“But why did this happen? We prepared the same offerings as every year!”

Isabella widened her eyes in realization, hearing Libella. “Impossible...” Then she started to carefully observe the magic circle on the ground. “I can’t believe it... It’s been rewritten...” she muttered in shock. “It’s cleverly disguised, but someone has rewritten the magic circle!”

“What?!”

“This is bad! If we leave it that way, it won’t become a festival dedicated to Éclair but...!” Isabella stopped herself, then ordered the Nimues in the room, “Send messenger pixies! Immediately send them above to stop the tournament!”

“Huh?!”

“Quick! If it continues, I feel like something terrible will happen!”

Obedying their chief’s instruction, the Nimues started sending messenger pixies one after another, but at the same time, the darkness in the room suddenly spread, and countless shadows came out of it. They were cursed swordsmen wearing black rags—phantom knights. The instant they appeared, they cut all the messenger pixies with unbelievable speed, considering their appearance.

“What?! Why are the cursed soldiers of the demon kingdom here?!” Libella screamed, trembling with fear.

All the other Nimues also fell into chaos.

“I was too late to notice!” Isabella said, gritting her teeth. Then she took her wand, pointed it at the phantom knights that kept appearing from the darkness, and started to chant.

At the same time, in the arena, the “white darkness” created by Endea’s Greater Incantation finally started to clear away. The hellish cold lessened, and warmth came back. And, at the center of the field—the source of the cold—was...a huge lump of ice with Sid inside it. No matter how one looked at it, he wasn’t alive. There was no way someone could be alive in such a state.

“M-Master?!”

“I-Impossible!”

Tenko, Elaine, and the other Blitze class students cried, their faces filled with despair.

“It can’t be... Did Sir Sid really lose...?” Louise muttered, shocked, as she couldn’t believe what she saw.



“H-Hey... The empire’s knight won...”

“Does that mean we’re vassals to the empire now...?”

“Wh-What’ll happen now...?”

The citizens spoke one after another, anxious now that they had lost their last hope.

“Ha ha ha ha ha ha! I won!” Wolf exclaimed with delight. “The Barbarian? The legendary era’s strongest knight? He wasn’t much of a threat! I hope you remember your promise, Alvin! You’re mine now! I’ll discipline you, you unruly woman!”

At this instant, everyone in the arena was certain of Sid’s defeat. The Blitze class students, the spectators, the knights, the three dukes, and Wolf. Everyone.

All the people who adored him looked away, unable to face the harsh reality.

However...there was one person who was different.

Only Alvin continued to silently stare at the center of the field. She was the only one with trust in her eyes.

Sir Sid swore to me that he’d win. So...

And, lastly...

“It ended as I expected...” Endea muttered as she stared at Sid inside the lump of ice.

He had died instantly. There was no need to even check if he was dead. Anyone caught in this eternal prison of ice wouldn’t be able to survive. It would steal all the life force of the person inside, transforming them into a husk.

“You should have known that you would end like this by fighting against me...” She slowly approached the lump of ice, looking at Sid sadly. “You were exactly like the stories I heard of you. You fought until the end, risking your life to protect your master and the people. However, I’m not included in the people

you must protect. After all, I am...”

She put her hand on the ice and caressed it. Then she pressed her cheek against it.

“But that’s fine... Even if it’s like this, now you’re mine. You, in this unchanging ice, and me, by your side. We’ll always be together... Even if this world is destroyed...” she whispered to herself, when suddenly...she heard something that shouldn’t be possible—Sid’s heartbeat.

“...Huh?” Endea let out as she raised her head to look up at Sid.

And then...the sound of ice breaking rang out. The lump of ice cracked in two vertically, then shattered to pieces.

Endea leaped back with a cry of surprise, then raised her head once again. In front of her was...

“Hey, don’t just end the match on your own.”

It was Sid. He was leaning over, and his right hand, shaped like a sword, was down as if he had just swung it.

“H-How?! You shouldn’t be alive after receiving my Greater Incantation!”

“Well, I’m alive, so what can I say?” Sid stood up and cracked his neck. “Your cold wasn’t enough to stop my heart. It’s as simple as that.”

His frozen body was back to normal. Even though all his mana should have been stolen, he was now brimming with it.

“I-Impossible... How...?” Endea asked, flustered by Sid’s comeback.

“It’s pretty simple. From the start, our match was an endurance contest.”

“A-An endurance contest?”

“Yep,” he answered while stretching his legs left and right. “True, your dark cold is quite a pain. After all, even if I knead mana with Will, it freezes and disappears. And because you’re surrounded by it, not only your offense but your defense is perfect too. My main technique being Will, I had no way to beat you. I mean, without Will, I’m just a man with a trained body.”

Endea frowned.

“Then what should I do? I just need to wait for you to use up your power and weaken.”

“Ah...”

“So I kneaded the least amount of Will possible and only protected my heart. Luckily, my blood is Saint’s Blood, so it’s highly resistant to darkness. What’s more, the heart is where all the blood in the body gathers. So as long as it can move, I can knead Will.”

“Wh-What...? Th-That’s...” Endea stepped back, trembling with fear from hearing how abnormal Sid was.

Sid asked her calmly, “Well then, Endea. You’ve used your Greater Incantation, right? You might be more powerful than before, but using a Greater Incantation with so much strength should have exhausted you quite a bit, no?”

Endea gasped. Sid was right.

“If you didn’t get excited and slowly froze me to death instead, your chances of winning would have been around 30%. But now, it’s zero.”

“Wh-What?! There’s no way that I, the one who will engulf this world in darkness, can lose!” She glared at Sid and raised her fairy sword overhead. “I’ll freeze you as many times as I need!” she yelled, releasing new cold waves.

However, because she had just used her Greater Incantation, their power was far inferior to before.

“Hah!” Sid roared and easily blew them away.

“Huh?!” Endea stood in shock, still holding her sword overhead.

“It’s over, Endea.”

Sid breathed and burned a tremendous amount of Will. His heart beat strongly, and boiling magma-like blood spread around his body, filling it with mana.

The next instant, a line of lightning appeared on the ground.

Sid transformed into a flash of light and ran along it at divine speed and cut

the darkness with his left hand.

“Aaaaaaaaaaah?!” Endea screamed, sent flying away before even being able to react.

Silence filled the arena.

On one side of the field was Endea, collapsed on the ground.

On the opposite side was Sid, in a forward-bent posture, his left arm swung down.

There was only the crackling sound of lightning coming from the dregs of the line drawn on the field.

It was an incredible reversal from a desperate situation. What was the Premier Chevalier? What did being the strongest knight mean? What just happened was the perfect answer to these questions.

For a while, everyone was speechless and stared at the field dumbfounded. However, little by little, they started to realize that Sid had won and earned the title of Premier Chevalier, and...

“Ooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooh!”

Loud cheers resounded.

“I-Impossible! It can’t be!” Wolf shouted, trembling.

“A-Aaah...”

“H-How...?”

“I-Impossible...”

The three dukes were shivering too.

Only Alvin was calm. “The match is over,” she said. “Prince Wolf. Sir Sid became the Premier Chevalier. It’s proof enough that the kingdom’s knights are superior to the empire’s. Now it’s time to fulfill our agreement between kings.”

Wolf groaned.

“First, you have to recognize my kingship. Then the empire has to throw away all of its spirit gears and retreat from the Langrissa Fort. Understood?” It was her natural right to ask for what they had agreed on, but...

“Don’t screw with me!” Wolf screamed and started complaining. “I won’t accept it... I’ll never accept such an outcome! The kingdom is mine! *You* are mine, Alvin!”

“You’re being a sore loser, Prince Wolf. Do you plan to break a promise between kings? If you do, the imperial family will lose its standing, and you’ll become the laughingstock of the continent.”

“Who’s this white knight anyway?! I don’t know her! That woman isn’t my knight! So this match is invalid!”

“You think I’ll accept such an excuse?!”

“And what do you plan to do from now on?! You think a woman like you can survive without my protection?! You really think you can defend the kingdom from my empire and the northern demon kingdom?!”

“I am resolved to do so,” Alvin declared firmly.

Seeing her so dignified and noble, so king-like, Wolf...

“N-No! I-It’s wrong... You shouldn’t be like that!” He denied her.

Alvin ignored him and stood at the front of the terrace. Then she shouted toward the capital citizens, “Listen!”

The wind fairies wandering around the terrace delivered her voice to the spectators, making them calm down from their euphoria over Sid’s victory.

Alvin looked at them, then announced, “The Premier Chevalier was decided! His name is Sid Blitze, my first knight! He was resurrected from the legendary era and is the strongest and greatest knight ever, Sir Sid Blitze the Lightning Knight! He followed my royal decree and proved that the kingdom knights were stronger than the empire’s in front of Éclair! And, as everyone knows, with this victory, the Kingdom of Calvania earned its freedom and won’t have to be under the Dragnir Empire! The kingdom won’t yield to the empire! Nor will it yield to the northern demon kingdom! We’ll be free forever! We’ll never

become slaves to larger countries! As the great Holy King Arthur's descendant, I, Alvin Noll Calvania, swear on my name that as long as I'm alive, I'll protect this nation and its people!"

Hearing her words, the spectators looked at her with eyes full of hope, but...

"Don't be deceived, subjects of Calvania!" Wolf's loud voice threw cold water on the people's enthusiasm. "Did you forget?! Alvin isn't a man but a woman!"

Everyone gasped, remembering that fact.

"Do you think a woman king can protect you from the demon kingdom?! That you can survive without my...the empire's protection?! I personally came here to save you! Do you plan to choose a woman king and reject my kindness?! Why can't you understand that having Prince Alvin—no, Princess Alma—marry me and coming under the Dragnir Empire is the best choice for the kingdom?!"

Little by little, anxiety started to spread through the people. And, as if to incite even more anxiety...

"Prince Wolf is right! Prince Alvin is a woman!"

"There is no way she can replace the previous king Auld!"

"A woman cannot become king! This is the law! We must abide by it!"

The three dukes spoke, explaining how righteous they were, that Wolf and the empire were powerful, unlike the current weak kingdom, and that old laws should be followed.

Wolf and the three dukes desperately appealed to the people.

The citizens became doubtful. Indeed, women couldn't become kings. That was an idea deeply ingrained in the mind of anyone living in Calvania. It was common sense. As such, doubt spread through the spectators as they wondered if it was really fine to accept Alvin as their king. That, maybe, it would be better to become vassal to the empire.

The people's zeal cooled down, shackled by the old laws. Their eyes, which had been full of hope, went back to normal.

However...

“Who cares about old laws?!” a loud voice resounded, reaching for the spectator’s souls once again. It was Sid.

He, who was usually calm and composed, raised his voice to be heard by everyone.

“Stop hesitating in fear of the unknown and remember! Didn’t our lord, Alvin Noll Calvania, prove his worth numerous times already?! Who went to the front line to protect everyone when a giant dragon attacked?! Who fought against the darkness to get back his best friend?! Who continued to fight endlessly to protect this country from bandits, dark forces, and monsters?! It was our lord! Many times, he proved his nobleness and his resolve by protecting the weak and fighting for others to the point of sacrificing himself!”

Hearing his words, the citizens and the squires of the Royal Fairy Knight Academy imagined Alvin protecting someone with her sword. And, for some reason, the Holy King Arthur overlapped with her, even though they didn’t even know what he looked like.

“His noble determination and conduct, as well as his strong will! It doesn’t matter whether Alvin is a woman or a man! I saw my former lord, the Holy King Arthur, in Alvin! Thus, I swear here and now, as the greatest knight in the kingdom, the Premier Chevalier Sid Blitze, that my eternal loyalty isn’t toward the throne but Alvin Noll Calvania!”

With everyone’s eyes fixed on him, Sid turned toward Alvin and kneeled.



“So, let me ask once again, fellow countrymen and knights of the Kingdom of Calvania! Are you serving an old throne full of mold or one with the bright soul of a king who will pave the future with his own sword?!”

Hearing Sid’s speech, the citizens and the knights responded.

“King Alvin...” someone muttered.

Then another, and yet another. People, who were all in a trance, looked at Alvin, calling her king.

Until, finally...

“Long live King Alvin!” citizens and knights alike all shouted together.

Alvin calmly accepted their cheering while looking at Sid, who was kneeling on the field.

“I’m really glad you became my knight...” she muttered.

Maybe he had heard her, as Sid faintly smiled, still bowing.

However, just as everything had been resolved...there was the sound of a sword being unsheathed behind Alvin.

“I won’t accept this... I’ll never accept this, Alvin!” Wolf shouted, pointing his spirit gear at her.

“Have you lost your mind, Prince Wolf?” Alvin turned back and asked calmly, not perturbed.

Wolf laughed madly, then said, “Idiot! The Premier Chevalier doesn’t matter!” He sneered, still pointing his sword at her, then turned toward the dukes. “Hey, what are you waiting for?!”

The three dukes hurriedly unsheathed their swords.

“Damn it! Why did it come to this?!”

“I won’t accept such an outcome!”

“We will never recognize a fool like you as king!”

Alvin looked at them and noticed they weren’t holding fairy swords but spirit

gears. Most likely, they had received them when they sided with Wolf. They pointed them with trembling hands toward her. They were four against one, and they all had spirit gears, weapons far more powerful than fairy swords.

“Ha ha ha ha ha! How do you like that? We’ve reversed the situation! You get it, now?! The tournament didn’t matter! You didn’t have a chance to win from the start!” Wolf declared.

Alvin stayed silent.

“I have power, spirit gears, the Imperial Knight Order, and the three dukes and their armies! Moreover, the Langrissa Fort is in our hands! Did you really think I’d withdraw?! You fool!”

Alvin calmly listened to him.

“The only reason I played a game with you, a woman, was to entertain myself! But now, that’s over! It’s time to fight and show you the power of a true king! Ha ha ha ha! I’ll utterly destroy the kingdom until you cry and apologize, Alvin!”

“...Stop. It’s your loss.” Alvin shook her head sorrowfully, looking at Wolf, who had eyes full of madness. “If you show good faith, I’ll treat you properly as a king. However, if you insist on breaking our promise and menacing the kingdom, then I won’t show you any mercy.”

“Pretending to be tough, huh?! You’re bluffing!”

“I’m neither pretending to be tough nor am I bluffing. I’m only stating the truth. Also,” she turned toward the three dukes, “I’m saddened by your betrayal. Still, I’m not forgetting how much you gave to the kingdom since the previous king’s reign. If you swear loyalty to me now, I...”

“Sh-Shut up! You say that, but you are going to execute us, right?!”

“You won’t deceive us!”

“We won’t give the country to you! Never! It’s ours!”

Wolf, Duke Durande, Duke Ortol, and Duke Anthalo turned a deaf ear to her.

“I see...” Alvin breathed out, looking down sadly.

“Alvin! You’re miiiiine!” Wolf went mad and prepared to assault Alvin.

The next instant, lightning fell on his sword.

“Gyaaaaaaah!” Wolf screamed in pain as lightning ran through his body and blew him away against a wall.

Alvin glanced at him pityingly. “Did you forget? Your white knight was defeated. Nobody can protect you from Sir Sid anymore. Now you’re just a hostage and prisoner of war.”

“Are you all right, my lord?” Sid had suddenly appeared behind her, protecting her.

“I am. It was a splendid attack, good work.”

Then Sid turned toward the three dukes, still pointing their swords at Alvin. “So, do you still want to fight? Do you want to try to see if you can wound my lord with your poor skills?”

They felt like frogs being glared at by a snake, trembling with pale faces. Even if the spirit gears gave them tremendous strength, they couldn’t imagine winning against Sid.

However, there was one person who didn’t give up yet.

“Alma...! You’re...mine!” Even with his body scorched, he stood up and took a stance with his sword. His expression was dreadful, like a demon.

Sid reached for his sword at his waist, but Alvin stopped him.

“Why?” she asked sadly. She couldn’t understand why Wolf was so obsessed with making her his.

“Shut up... A woman like you...shouldn’t become king!”

“No matter what you say, I’ll live as a king. The previous king’s will and whether I have the strength for it no longer matter. I made the decision on my own.”

“That’s wrong! I... I...!” Wolf started to scream, throwing a tantrum like a child. “It’s your fault, Sid Blitze the Barbarian!” he yelled and raised his spirit gear overhead, preparing to release all of its power against Sid.

But at the exact same time, shrieks could be heard in the arena.

“What?” Alvin stiffened, confused by what was happening.

The three dukes suddenly started to violently moan in pain.

“Gaaaaah! What’s happening?!”

“S-Something inside me is being drained?!”

“H-Help me! Save meeee!”

Something was being absorbed with great speed from the dukes and flowed into the spirit gears they were holding, dyeing their blades in black. In contrast, just as quickly, their bodies became whiter and whiter as they withered, transforming into mummies, until finally...they became lumps of salt and crumbled.

“Gaaaaaaah!”

Naturally, Wolf wasn’t an exception. In fact, his knights who were in the arena—the source of the earlier shrieks—were also withering and transforming into lumps of salt.

Sid immediately used his spiritual sense and understood the truth about the phenomenon. *Their mana... Their life force is being absorbed by their swords?*

Wolf, having stronger life force than most, was the last who held a spirit gear still alive, but he became so thin it was like he was a different person. His death was near.

“P-Prince Wolf!” Alvin couldn’t ignore him, so she extended her hand, but...

“Don’t, Alvin. If you touch him, the same will happen to you.” Sid stopped her.

Alvin could only look at Wolf as he was dying in front of her.

“A-Al...vin... I-I...only wan...ted you to...be...”

However, before being able to finish his sentence, Wolf transformed into a lump of salt and crumbled like the others. Alvin lowered her extended hand and hung her head sadly.

At the same time, Wolf’s spirit gear fell to the ground, its blade completely black. It looked just like a black fairy sword.

As the audience was panicking, shocked and trembling with fear from the strange phenomenon, the spirit gears in the arena suddenly floated and gathered in the sky. No, it wasn't only the ones in the arena. Countless black blades came flying from the west too. It was like a black meteor shower.

They came from the west, where the Langrissa Fort is... Don't tell me...they're all the spirit gears owned by the Imperial Knight Order?! Alvin gritted her teeth in realization as she looked up at the swords in the sky, forming a black circle.

And then...

"Finally, the time has come." A strangely clear voice resounded in the arena.

A woman had appeared in the center of the black circle—Flora. In her arms was Endea—who should have been arrested and taken away earlier—still injured from her fight against Sid.

"Indeed, the time has come for this world to be engulfed in darkness once again."

"Flora! That means you succeeded?!" Endea asked, excited.

"Yes, everything went smoothly. All the preparations that we, the Dark Order of Opus, secretly made, came to fruition. We can hold *that* ritual whenever you want," Flora said with a smile.

Endea laughed madly. "Ha ha ha ha ha! Oh, hateful Alvin! Finally... I can finally steal everything from you and destroy you! I can finally take my revenge after all these years!"

"Endea!" Alvin shouted.

"Listen and pay attention! In a few moments, I'll become the Demon King! I'll plunge this world into darkness and bring about an eternal winter!"

"What?! The Demon King?!"

The Demon King was the master of the northern demon kingdom of Dachnesia during the legendary era. He was the enemy of the world and tried to bring about an eternal winter using his overwhelming dark mana. He was the strongest and the worst dark knight loved by Opus, the fairy god of darkness.

Alvin's ancestor, the Holy King Arthur, had led knights from the entire world

to fight against him. It was only after a fierce fight and the death of many knights that they had barely managed to defeat him...or, at least, that was how the legend went.

“You’re the Demon King’s successor, Endea?!”

“Yes, I am. You didn’t notice? And here I thought you had some inkling... You’re truly stupid!” Endea sneered. Her face was exactly the same as Alvin’s, but the way she smiled was totally different.

Alvin knew that the Dark Order of Opus’s objective was the second coming of the Demon King. It was for that reason they did shady things all over the continent and that Tenko’s homeland, Tenkagekoku, was destroyed. She also understood that, using unknown methods, they had finished their preparations to call forth a new Demon King.

However, she couldn’t understand why Endea was the Demon King’s successor. In the first place, who was she?

Alvin, descendant of the Holy King.

Endea, successor of the Demon King.

Why did these two opposites have the same face?

The Blitze class students, Louise and the other squires, and all the spectators wondered the same thing and trembled from the shock of all these revelations.

No. There was one person who was different. He was a knight from the legendary era, once called the Barbarian, and executed by his own lord, the Holy King Arthur—Sid. He looked silently at Endea as if he had realized something...as if he had *remembered* something.

Then, representing everyone in the arena, Alvin asked, “Endea... Who are you?”

“Hmph!” Endea snorted, looking down on Alvin with scorn. “You still don’t remember? Even after seeing my face, you still don’t get it? Even though we look the same... Or, maybe, to you, I was just an insignificant existence?! You’re really heartless!”

It was more than simple resentment. Endea’s eyes were full of pure,

unadulterated hatred.

Being on the receiving end of such strong negative emotions, Alvin couldn't help but flinch.

"I'm Elma. I'm your twin little sister, Alvin...no, Alma," Endea announced.



Alvin gasped. She couldn't understand what she had just heard. After all, the previous king Auld only had a *son*. Alvin didn't have any siblings. And yet, Endea just had called herself Alvin's little sister.

The truth about the Holy King's bloodline and the ominous darkness it hid was on the point of being revealed.

Afterword

Hello, I'm Taro Hitsuji.

Magic Knight of the Old Ways: Volume 4 has successfully made it to print! A big thank you to my editor, all the people involved in the publication process, and to all the readers!

Since my debut, quite a number of the books I wrote were released, so it almost makes me think that it's natural that anything I write is published, but in fact, it's not. It's something amazing that only happens thanks to everyone's support, and I plan to do my best in writing even more without forgetting my gratitude.

Now, about this volume. The story had quite the development.

Alvin confronting the issue of being a girl is something I've been wanting to write since the moment I thought up the plot of *Old Ways*. Until this volume, she had been aiming to become king by cooperating with many people while hiding the fact that she was a woman. However, in a way, that was just turning away from the most important problem. You could say that she was just avoiding reality and deceiving everyone. Because of that, Alvin always felt guilty about the trust everyone had in her.

Once that truth is revealed, what will become of Alvin's feelings toward kingship, and what path will she choose? Does a woman like her really have the qualifications to become king? Surely, as her knight, Sid will once again show her the way and open her path. Also, this time, Sid is truly peerless and unstoppable, ha ha.

This is the kind of refreshing chivalric romance I want to write, and I'd be very happy as the author if you enjoyed it!

Also, I post status and life updates on Twitter, so if you send words of

encouragement or opinions about my work there, it would make this little sheep very happy and work harder. My username is @Taro_hitsuji.

With that said, thank you very much, and see you again in the next volume!

Taro Hitsuji







Taro Hitsuji

Illustrated by

Asagi Tohsaka

IV

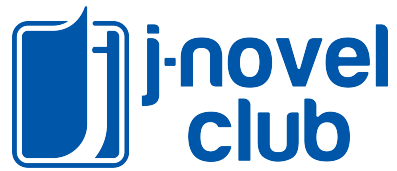
Magic Knight of the Old Ways











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Magic Knight of the Old Ways: Volume IV

by Taro Hitsuji

Translated by Boris Lecourt Edited by Drew Fitzgerald

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